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Vegan Food For Thought: Moral Constructions of Animals

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VEGAN FOOD FOR THOUGHT: MORAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF ANIMALS

A Dissertation Presented

by

RYAN F. TURNER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Sociology

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ABSTRACT

VEGAN FOOD FOR THOUGHT: MORAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF ANIMALS

SEPTEMBER 2021

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This dissertation examines how humans make moral sense of and with animals. Each substantive chapter is devoted to one of three topics: animal selfhood, veganism, and animal rights. In chapter two, I examine animal selfhood and its moral implications. I argue that animal selves, particularly in an elemental Meadian sense, are potentially real, but in most cases are unobservable or unverifiable phenomena. I also argue that any moral theory of animal rights based on animal selfhood is limited by the empirical and epistemological limitations of substantiating animal selves. In chapter three, I present the interactional strategies ethical vegans employ when presenting their moral beliefs to non-vegans. Using in-depth interviews and observations of vegan gatherings, I find that most vegans, those who use what I call “strategic individualism,” think of veganism as a general moral imperative—that humans ought to be vegan as a matter of social justice for animals—yet they frequently individualized their positions when interacting with nonvegans to avoid interpersonal conflict and thereby engage nonvegans. The difference in their private morals and their public presentation demonstrates that individualism may be better understood less as a fundamental orientation, which is the dominant approach in cultural sociology, so much as an interactional strategy to achieve particular goals. Lastly, in chapter four, I use interviews and observations to examine how animal welfarists and animal

abolitionists complicate Max Weber's distinction between the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of conviction. While Weber argued that ethical conduct is guided by two opposing and irreconcilable ethics—responsibility and ultimate ends—I argue that both the welfarists and abolitionists exhibit non-negotiable moral convictions while also demonstrating concerns about the consequences of their activism. Overall, this dissertation contributes to sociological understandings of animal selfhood, individualism, and ethics of responsibility and conviction.

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CHAPTER 1

ANIMALS, MORALS, AND MANNERS

In 2007, National Football League star quarterback Michael Vick was charged by the Federal government for sponsoring illegal dog fighting, gambling on dog fighting, and hosting animal cruelty on his property. Vick pleaded guilty to these charges and spent twenty-one months in prison (ESPN). Public reaction to Vick was negative. He lost sponsors, including Nike and Reebok (Francione 2007). The animal rights organization, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, condemned his actions claiming that “Dogfighting is unacceptable. Hurting animals for human pleasure or gain is despicable. Cruelty is just plain wrong” (Farmer 2007). A Gallup Poll showed that 88% of NFL fans believed that Vick should face some jail time, and 58% of NFL fans thought that he should not be able to return to the NFL (Jones 2007). Yet, by 2009, Michael Vick had indeed returned to the NFL, signing with the Philadelphia Eagles. The moral discourse shifted from condemnation of his dog fighting to the plausibility of redemption. Dave Stanley (2010) of the Bleacher Report wrote,

“We all love an inspiring comeback story; a vindicating tale of redemption is ‘Must See TV’. Perhaps it is because it gives us hope for overcoming our own shortcomings. The sight of an athlete reclaiming glory against all odds in some ways allows us to live vicariously through him.”

Vick also believed he was warranted a second chance based on his evolved moral character, claiming, “I think as long as you're willing to come back and do it the right way and do the right things that makes you committed, then I think you deserve it,” Vick said. “But you only get one shot at a second chance” (Jackson 2009). A local Philadelphia news article highlighted that

tension over Vick's return from the perspective of NFL fans. On the one hand, some fans used the language of redemption, claiming that Vick and people more generally deserve second chances. On the other hand, some fans believed Vick should not return because he had harmed animals (Jackson 2009).

There are two dominant moral narratives about Vick and his treatment of animals, both of which are simultaneously intertwined and in conflict. One involves narratives of condemnation, specifically disapproval of his treatment of animals. The foundation of this narrative is the moral evaluation of Vick's actions, e.g., dog fighting is wrong. The second narrative is of redemption, as some have conceded that Vick committed wrongdoing, yet they argue that he made up for it by doing his time. Therefore, he is entitled to a second chance (Stanley 2010). In addition, Vick might be a recipient of forgiveness because he went from participating in dog fighting to supporting legislation that would help save animals, mostly dogs, from hot cars (Diaz 2015). The foundation of this narrative is Vick's improved moral character; he has learned his lesson through punishment and has changed his actions for the better. He has reformed himself morally. Morality permeates both narratives, informing both the disapproval of Vick's actions and the forgiveness of his transgressions.

Vick's case highlights how important morality is for thinking about animals, specifically how the moral construction of animals is multivocal and contested. While many Americans find dogfighting reprehensible, some, like former NBA star Stephon Marbury, have classified it as a sport, like hunting (Chung 2007). Part of what is at issue here are distinctions among species, as deer hunting is legally and culturally permissible while dog fighting is not. But even these distinctions are not straightforward conclusions as many condemn hunting (Einwohner 1999)

and some justifying dog fighting. The constant, however, is the centrality of moral judgment in our thinking about animals.

Vick's case also demonstrates the contradictions in the way individuals think about the morality of animals. For example, while many individuals condemned Vick's actions, perhaps they are just as guilty of animal abuse in their own lives. Indeed, animal rights philosopher Gary Francione (2007) argues that humans have "moral schizophrenia" about animals, meaning that we do not think clearly about our moral obligations to animals. Francione makes the point that it is morally inconsistent to condemn Vick for dog fighting if you eat, wear, or use animals as any means to an end. He argues:

"There is something bizarre about condemning Michael Vick for using dogs in a hideous form of entertainment when 99 percent of us also use animals that are every bit as sentient as dogs in another hideous form of entertainment that is no more justifiable than fighting dogs: eating animals and animal products" (2007).

Francione concludes that "we are all Michael Vick" because the actions of eating animals and making dogs fight are moral equivalents, both done out of pleasure, and therefore morally wrong.

While in my view Francione makes a strong argument, it is not so much his moral reasoning as his empirical claims that are the starting point for a sociological perspective on animals (more on this below). His argument that humans have confused or at the very least inconsistent thinking and behavior about the moral status of animals in society emphasizes that animals are ideal sites for examining morality more generally. Specifically, because humans can attribute various moral meanings to animals, animals are a good cultural location for making sense of the social construction of morality more generally. For example, humans place animals

into various categories, all of which carry moral significance and thus shape how we think and act toward animals in those categories (Arluke and Sanders 1996). Humans also use animals to make moral claims about other humans. When individuals call someone “an animal,” their intent is, quite literally, to dehumanize or otherize the object of their scorn. In such a case, drawing boundaries explicitly or implicitly calls into question a person’s moral worth. Lastly, individuals can intentionally or unintentionally elevate their own status or promote group cohesion through moral claims about animals, such as animal rights activists who discuss with each other their moral awakenings to the sins of animal abuse (Jasper and Nelkin 1992).

My focus in this dissertation is how individuals make moral sense of animals, and the larger sociological implications of such sensemaking. To this aim, there are three substantive chapters that address this issue, each from a different direction. In Chapter two, I examine how sociologists have examined animal selfhood, largely relying on interactionist ideas of the self. Far from old interactionist thought, which denied animal’s selves, some sociologists who have studied animal-human relations argue that animals are, in important senses, self-aware. I distinguish five criteria of the self to evaluate their arguments, ultimately concluding that animal selves may be real, but that the evidence is insufficient. Though my main focus is on evaluating arguments of animal selfhood, I also analyze how sociologists, inspired by moral philosophers, have used animal selfhood to make claims about animal welfare and rights.

In the following chapters, I more explicitly address everyday moral constructions of animals by examining the moral claims of vegans and animal rights activists. In doing so, my aim is to address how my research connects to larger sociological theory. In chapter three, I interviewed vegans about how they address the moral status of animals when they interact with nonvegans. While many of these vegans privately believe that humans have a moral obligation

not to harm animals, they also publicly presented their moral beliefs about animals as individual beliefs rather than collective obligations. In other words, they reformulate their moral beliefs, accommodating to specific situations, using American individualism as a strategic resource to avoid conflict. In chapter four, I empirically examine Max Weber's (1946) ethical distinction between an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of ultimate ends by interviewing two different groups of animal activists. The first group, the welfarists, largely believe in small scale cultural and legal reform regarding animal use. They seemingly practice an ethic of responsibility as they are concerned about the consequences of their activism. Thus, they believe that they should make small demands on the public to change their treatment of animals to not alienate them. The second group, the abolitionists, believe in abolishing all animal use because it is morally unjustifiable. They seemingly practice an ethic of ultimate ends, advocating for the abolition of animal use without a concern for how it affects the larger public. Yet I find both groups complicate Weber's ethical distinction, as both groups practice, to various degrees, ethics of responsibility and conviction.

Overall, my goal in this dissertation is to examine how the moral construction of animals has larger sociological implications, including sociological understandings of individualism and ethics.

Animals and Morality

Since I examine animals and morality in this dissertation, I now review some of the literature on this topic. The sociological literature that examines animals and morality has produced a few key findings. The first important theme focuses on how humans categorize animals and thus give them moral meaning. According to Arluke and Sanders (1996), humans categorize animals similarly to how they categorize themselves. There are both "good" and

“bad” people and animals. We rank animals based on how well they fit into our society or how well they play the roles they are expected to enact. “Good animals” have high status because they willingly accept their subordinate status in society. These animals are highly visible, part of human lives. In contrast, “bad animals” have a low moral status as humans enforce their subordinate position in society. Each construction relies on the opposite construction to gain meaning.

Arluke and Sanders (1996) argue that humans categorize “pets” and “tools” as good animals. Americans often treat pets, such as dogs and cats, as humans, thinking of pets as friends and companions. These animals, then, have high moral worth. For example, many Americans are troubled by the Lychee and Dog Meat Festival, an annual celebration held in Yulin, Guangxi, China, because they believe that humans should not eat dogs because they are companions, a moral category incompatible with violence. Farm and lab animals are not pets but they are usually thought of as tools. Humans do not treat them as humanlike because they often believe that such animals have limited cognitive abilities (Arluke and Sanders 1996). Both pets and tools benefit humans and therefore humans view them favorably. In contrast, Americans view “bad” animals, like pests and vermin, negatively. Society ignores, marginalizes, segregates, or kills these animals. These animals do not have a clear place in the moral order because they are of little use for humans. These animals are demonized, and are often equated with aggrieved social groups (Arluke and Sanders 1996).

Animals, especially “bad animals,” can be categorized as social problems or moral concerns. City dwellers have long viewed pigeons as social problems in US cities. For example, starting in the 1930s and intensifying in the 1960s, New York City officials viewed pigeons as a health menace. The birds were linked to a form of meningitis that could kill humans (Jerolmack

2008). While pigeons were blamed for the deaths of two people, there was no evidence of transmissions of diseases from pigeons to people. In contrast, Colin Jerolmack (2008) argues that pigeons were social problems because New Yorkers viewed the pigeons as out of place; the birds violated the boundary between nature and human civilization. In other words, pigeons as animals did not belong in human spaces. Combined with the fact that American cities were attempting to present themselves as orderly clean spaces during the 1960s, New Yorkers thought of pigeons not only as outsiders but disorderly outsiders, unclean animals akin to the homeless and other unwanted beings. Pigeons represented disorder and impurity and their removal signaled the restoration of moral order.

Animal categorizations are not monolithic; different groups and institutions within a society may give different moral meanings to animals. For instance, Arnold Arluke's (from Arluke and Sanders 1996) research in primate labs illustrated how lab workers attributed different moral values to primates. In one lab, workers viewed primates as sources of work. The boundary between the primates and humans was prominent as many of the workers depersonalized the monkeys, treating them as objects. The culture of the lab even encouraged cruel treatment of the primates; those who could wrestle and beat up large monkeys were awarded social honor. The workers thought that the monkeys would be unhappy at the lab, so there was no use in exercising the monkeys or creating stimulating environments for them. Another primate lab, on the other hand, morally elevated the monkeys. The workers nurtured the monkeys and treated them like companions. Workers thought that bargaining with the monkeys was a better idea than overpowering them. In addition, many of the workers felt that they got something back from the primates such as love and affection. Therefore, most of the workers found it difficult to draw a line between humans and primates.

According to Arluke, the different meaning systems constructed by the workers of the two labs can be partially explained by the labs' managerial structures. Key individuals who had authority in the lab reinforced different moral constructions of the primates. In the first lab, the director hired people who saw the work "as just a job," and had no special interest in animals or science (Arluke and Sanders 1996: 124). In contrast, the head veterinarian of the other lab wanted to hire people who cared about the primates' well-being. In addition to managerial structures, the workers also created norms that facilitated treatment of the primates as discussed above. In sum, the creation of these two meaning systems illustrates the human ability to create or dissolve boundaries among humans and animals, therefore constructing or deconstructing animal categorization systems.

In general, animal categorizations affect how humans treat, view, and think about animals. Like human categorizations, animal categorizations are not value free; they involve hierarchies with pets at the top and "demons" and "vermin" at the bottom (Arluke and Sanders 1996). How humans socially and morally construct animals is based on the human uses that animals can provide. Importantly, animals of the same species will not always be categorized the same way. Dogs that are pets are considered "good animals" but dogs that race are considered "tools." These categorizations thus affect the interactions between humans and animals, and how humans think of and treat animals. For instance, greyhound racers and trainers have very few friendly interactions; the relationship is framed as strictly professional (Arluke and Sanders 1996). In contrast, a caretaker and his or her pet dog are likely and are expected to have warm interactions. These relationships affect how humans treat animals. Most pet dogs are treated as or are considered members of the family. On the other hand, when greyhound racers retire, the

trainers have no use for them. Ultimately, these dogs end up being euthanized shortly after they retire. Thus, categorizations affect how we view the world and the moral worth of its inhabitants.

Another key theme in the sociological literature of animals and morality shows how dominant groups use the moral meanings of animals to facilitate the marginalization and stigmatization of subordinate groups, such as immigrants, depicting such groups as subhuman, uncivilized, and backward. The process is recursive: the characteristics of devalued human groups are attributed to animals and those animals are then used as metaphors to further devalue humans. For example, during the 1850s, English sparrows were imported into the US to help control insect pests, particularly the drop worm (Fine and Christoforides 1991). However, some Americans, including some politicians and ornithologists, viewed these sparrows with hostility. Their objection to the sparrow was that the birds ate more grain than insects, an economic problem. However, there was no data to support this. Instead, Fine and Christoforides (1991) argue that the moral qualities humans attributed to the sparrows facilitated the hatred of the birds.

The English sparrows were maligned because they were “immigrants.” Some Americans viewed the birds as “alien” and un-American.” The English sparrow as an immigrant metaphor went in both directions as many immigrants were referred to as a “swarm of foreigners” and “motley herd” (Fine and Christoforides 1991). In addition, sparrows harmed decent American birds. One politician during this time argued, “These sparrows do molest, harass, drive off, and otherwise maltreat and forcibly eject and attempt to destroy various kinds of native birds, which are thereby deprived of certain inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Fine and Christoforides 1991: 17). This rhetoric is very similar to human immigrants taking jobs and housing away from American workers, thereby depriving them of rights.

The English sparrow was also immoral and dirty. For example, one critic claimed, “Sparrows crowded cities; they were filthy, homely, noisy, and lascivious. Even crows (blacks) were superior. Their diet was disgusting. They were ungrateful to America, and did not fulfill their obligations as contract laborers” (Fine and Christoforides 1991: 17). In other words, they did not eat the drop worms. The sparrows were even denigrated in children’s books. In the book *Citizen Bird*, Elliot Coues depicts sparrows as bad citizens and criminals that were condemned by everyone (Fine and Christoforides 1991). The loathing of the sparrows was so severe that by the 1880s the federal government wanted to exterminate all English sparrows. Some states even made it illegal to feed them (Fine and Christoforides 1991). In sum, the sparrows represented the “immigration problem” in America. Both sparrows and immigrants were a perceived threat to the moral order of society. Fascinatingly, the sparrows were socially constructed as immoral birds to make moral claims about immigrants, both human and animal, thus justifying their exploitation and maltreatment.

Dominant groups can also stigmatize subordinate groups by labeling their animal practices as immoral. For instance, one American community became enraged when a Hmong immigrant killed his dog with a baseball bat in order to appease an evil spirit that he believed had plagued his wife with diabetes. The reason for killing the dog was illegitimate in the US dominant culture. The Hmong man killed a “pet” through noninstitutionalized means, using an illegitimate method and motive, upsetting many community members (Elder et al 2009). The immigrant was thus seen as a deviant killer because his animal practices were neither legitimate nor institutionalized in the US. This event spurred conflict between the white and Hmong populations. Because the Hmong man violated a place specific animal-human boundary, Hmong immigrants were seen as savage-like. Importantly, policing the human-animal boundary through

the regulation of animal practices is necessary to sustain the legitimacy of animal practices of the dominant group. By scrutinizing immigrant animal practices, dominant groups in the US construct immigrants as uncivilized, irrational, or beastly, and their own actions as civilized, rational, and humane (Elder et al 2009).

Other examples in the literature show how moral meanings attributed to animals reinforce hierarchies between dominant and subordinate groups. For example, Arluke and Sanders (1996) show how Nazis used animals to reaffirm symbolic boundaries between Germans and Jews. The Nazis morally elevated animals, thereby blurring the boundary between humans and animals. The Nazi government created animal protection laws such as anti-cruelty and anti-hunting acts (Arluke and Sanders 1996). Nature and animals were regarded as sacred. At the same time, the Nazis animalized humans and stressed human biological distinctions. They wanted to treat all humans, including themselves and Germans more broadly, like animals, specifically through selective breeding as an ideal means to purify bloodlines. They regarded Germans as livestock who should breed the purest biological forms, and regarded Jews as pests that could contaminate racial purity (Arluke and Sanders 1996). By animalizing human life, moral distinctions between people and animals were eradicated, “making it possible to treat animals as considerably as humans and humans as poorly as animals” (Arluke and Sanders 1996: 158). The Nazis argued that the Jews were genetically contaminating the Aryan race and were thus treated like animals with beastly or wild instincts. The Nazis thought of Jews and foreign workers as “lower animals,” such as rodents, reptiles, insects, and even germs (Arluke and Sanders 1996). The Nazis’ labeling of Jews as lower animals was a tactic to lower their moral worth—their humanity—to facilitate experimentation on Jews and their attempted extermination.

Examples of individuals animalizing humans in order to lower their moral status abound. When the Jews were mass migrating to the US during the late nineteenth century, the print media described Jews as “The Wolves of New York,” which depicted Jews as animal-like in their greed (Arluke and Sanders 2008). Other publications from this period often characterized Jews as weasels, hedgehogs, vampires, bats, or rats (Arluke and Sanders 2008). Moreover, groups of humans can be stigmatized through animal images if majority groups consider them a threat to the status quo. For example, during the controversy of black voting rights in 1867, a pamphlet argued that blacks were not descendants of Adam and Eve but had entered Noah’s ark with the beasts (Craig 1992). Typical representations of blacks during this period pictured them as gorillas dressed like men.

Lastly, there is also sociological literature on animal rights that explores various issues including how animal activist groups vary by beliefs and practices (Jasper and Nelkin 1992), gender demographics and animal rights (Peek et al 1996, Jerolmack 2003), how broad strategies of animal activists vary (Galvin and Herzog 1998, Schnurer 2002), how activists draw moral boundaries between themselves and their targets (Arluke and Groves 1998), how animal activism functions as a religion (Jamison et al 2000), among others. Consistent with this dissertation, the literature also explores how activists use morality as a cultural resource (Swidler 1986) to construct their identity or present their message to others. For example, many animal activists feel motivated by their ethical principles and emotions, which propels them into animal rights ideologies and organizations (Jasper 1997). In addition, activists use morality to “frame” their message to the public (Snow 1986, Bedford and Snow 1992). They often frame their ideas in ways that the public will receive positively (Freeman 2010). Activists do not only use morality instrumentally. They are also constrained by structures of morality, as established social ideals

and norms limit their moral reflexivity, or their reconciliation of their ideals with societal norms (Jacobsson and Lindblom 2016). Furthermore, Einwohner (1999) argues that activists are also constrained by the political opportunities associated with specific problems and subsequent moral transformations. For example, animal activists have protested animal experimentation and animal circuses with uneven outcomes in success. Animal researchers view animal experimentation as necessary and central to their own social well-being. Such unwillingness for change made it difficult for animal activists to abolish experimentation on moral grounds. In contrast, animal activists have had more success with limiting circus attendance and transforming the use of animals in circuses because the circus, compared to experimentation, is less tied to identity, group membership, and daily work. Overall, the perceived necessity of a practice is a central structural roadblock to moral change. I go into more detail covering animal rights literature in chapters three and four.

My goal in this dissertation is consistent with much of the literature above. I want to demonstrate the divergent ways sociologists, vegans, and animal activists morally construct animals. However, different from some of the literature above, I also want to examine how these moral constructions are socially enforced or transformed during the framing process, and how vegans and activists in particular make sense of this. That is, while individuals may have entrenched moral beliefs, these beliefs do not always transcend each situation in which individuals are located. Morality is not only a static thing that defines personal belief or facilitates group membership. It is also a strategy that individuals utilize differently depending on the situation and perceived common stocks of meaning that situation will permit. Morality is not simply a form of evaluation or what is right or wrong. It is also a strategy, especially for those

seeking moral transformation, in response to the cultural and moral constraints placed on individuals.

The Sociology of Morality

This dissertation is situated within the sociology of morality, so it is worth examining some issues within this field and how they relate to my dissertation. Very few sociologists today consider themselves sociologists of morality. Yet, many sociologists are engaged with morality, whether they less commonly study morality explicitly or more commonly make moral claims about the structure of society as a form of analysis. A preoccupation with morality was also at the core of sociology's origins as a discipline. Perhaps the best starting points for thinking about sociology and morality are Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. They had very different conceptions of morality, specifically over how sociologists can determine moral truths (Abend 2008). Weber saw morality as a social construction, as its meaning varies over time and across place. Durkheim, on the other hand, viewed morality as an objective truth. Even though Durkheim argues that different societies have different moralities, each society objectively defines what is right or wrong in that society.

Weber argued that there is no moral truth since morality is a subjective judgement. Weber was a descriptive relativist, meaning that he took the position that morals are relative, and that people have different moral beliefs based on their location in a social context (Tavory 2011). Thus, nothing is inherently right or wrong; morality is not "out there" or "real" or "objective" like gravity. In other words, moral beliefs are "socially constructed." A common example of the descriptive relativist approach, arguably the foundation of constructionist thought, compares how societies differently create and interpret social phenomena, including morality. For example, Romans thought differently about morals than we do today. Most sociologists use this to

demonstrate that there is nothing inherent about morals (Abend 2008). Instead, they are subject to social definition. Even if people feel they are objectively right about an issue—if they feel their judgments are true—it is an illusion because moral beliefs are created.

Weber (1978) also believed that morality was an important factor in explaining social action, or subjectively meaningful behavior. The best example of this is Weber's (1958) classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Here he argued that morality was a means of motivating individuals, independent of interests. Weber argued that Protestants felt a calling from God to fulfil their duty in worldly affairs or economic activities. According to Luther, a calling is the highest form of moral activity an individual could assume (Weber 1958: 40). This calling not only honored God, but also benefited the individual and community. Likewise, the Calvinists believed that labor was designed by God to serve the utility of the human race. Calvinists believed in predestination; part of humanity was saved to heaven, and the rest was damned to hell. Not knowing who was saved or damned, the Calvinists more or less convinced themselves that they were saved by accumulating capital, thereby promoting the glory of God. Calvinists had to prove their faith in worldly activity, or in other words, through their calling. Weber views morality as a guiding social force (e.g., a calling), experienced in the individuals as motivation (prove one's worth to God) promoting specific conduct (working for capital). Morality motivates conduct.

Like Weber, Durkheim also argued that morality influenced behavior, though he conceptualizes morality more as a constraint than motivation. Durkheim (1961), thought of morality as central to group formation and trust through two components. First, morality consists of norms of obligation that permit and forbid certain behaviors enforced through social sanctions. Thus, individuals have obligations to others, like family member obligations, which constrain

relations between them while also bringing them together. More generally, in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1997), Durkheim argued that cooperation between individuals is not simply secured through common (economic) interests but a common morality that binds individuals. Second, morality consists of ideals, or ideas about what is sacred in a society and notions of how societies ought to function. In *Moral Education* (1961), Durkheim argues that one of the central functions of education is to instill common norms and ideals in students to produce social order. Morality is thus both external and internal. It is externally imposed on individuals through norms, and is internally accepted by individuals experienced as ideals. Norms and ideals give society its moral order (Jacobsson and Lindblom 2016). In general, Durkheim argues that morality operates as a social fact, a coercive power external to and independent of the individual, which thereby produces social togetherness. Moral obligations and subsequent social cohesion are defined from without rather than within.

While Weber and Durkheim agree that morality influences social action, they disagree about other aspects of morality. In contrast to Weber, Durkheim argues that moral truth exists, but that it varies from one society to the next. Durkheim claims that changes in ideas about morality coincide with changes in the social structure. Thus, Romans may have different conceptions of morals because they lived in a different social structure than we do today. Certain structures create certain moralities (Abend 2008). For Durkheim, there are many moralities. However, moralities are not simply social constructions, as Weber had it. Within each type of society, questions about moral rightness can be answered objectively. In other words, there is a true morality for each society. What is right within a society is what that society defines as right. Morality, then, objectively exists as a definable order of fact, which sociologists can measure.

While Durkheim agrees that morals are constructed, he does not conclude from that there is not a right way to live. Durkheim takes the position that some moralities for a given society are better than others. In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1997), he argued that science can shed light on the direction our conduct ought to go, assisting us to an ideal. According to Durkheim, science can determine what is right based on the concepts of the normal and the pathological. Normal or “healthy” societies have alignment between their structure and morality. This is good and virtuous. Pathological or “unhealthy” societies have a misalignment between their structure and morality. This is akin to disease, which is bad and vicious. What is healthy and what is sick is not subjective, because it depends upon “an objective criterion, inherent in the facts themselves” (Durkheim 2014: 51). As long as sociologists understand the structure of a society, they could propose ways to improve that society’s morality, removing its imperfections.

Given Durkheim’s arguments about morality, he is best categorized as a normative relativist because he believes that different societies have different conceptions of the good, which is right for those societies (Abend 2008). Morals that produce a healthy society are the morals that society *should* possess. Science, presumably sociology, can help societies pinpoint which type of morality is best suited for a particular society’s structure. For example, using Durkheim’s (1997) distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity, those living under mechanical solidarity *should* follow their peers and perform similar tasks. Those living under organic solidarity *should* perform specific tasks in the larger division of labor, playing their part like an organ in the body. Both social structures require a specific morality to produce cohesion among individuals. If individuals in these structures produce the correct morality, then that society is healthily functioning. Furthermore, Durkheim argued that society’s social problems often indicate a lack of “moral solidarity.” For example, Durkheim (1951: 300) viewed high

levels of suicide as abnormal in societies, and that the way to address it was “a profound change in our social structure.” For societies to thrive, there must be a proper moral order holding each together.

There is a long tradition of sociologists who have taken a position similar to Durkheim's. They argue or imply there is moral truth, and that some moral orders are better than others. To use Durkheim's language, these sociologists have, more or less, argued that societies are “abnormal” if their moral orders produce undesirable results. For example, Durkheim's contemporary, Ferdinand Tönnies (2013) did not think that the change from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, or intimate community to impersonal association, was desirable because in the former individuals were bound by common values, norms, and kinship whereas in the latter individuals cared less about the common good and more about private advantage through economic and political ties. Tönnies was worried about the loss of community, as *gesellschaft* organizations meant “the doom of culture (2013: 22) and self-interest run amok. In other words, Tönnies argued that *gesellschaft* produced undesirable moral practices, including abandonment of community.

Concern about the lack of community in the US is a perennial issue among sociologists, who often make the claim that such an outcome is harmful to society's operation. Perhaps the most notable example is Robert Bellah et al's *Habits of the Heart*. Bellah certainly takes a Durkheimian approach as he believes in moral truth and believes that sociology can pinpoint structural/moral failings. Indeed, he (1985: 302) argues that the sociologist is a “public philosopher” and consequently cannot be “value free.” Bellah's central claim is that American culture has suffered a shift from a good mixture of community and individualism to rampant individualism. Thus, Americans share a common moral vocabulary of individualism, their first

language. Americans primarily speak of our individual goals, preferences, desires, and happiness over that of community obligations. Bellah believes that such a cultural change results in objectively bad outcomes because it prevents Americans from making sense of their lives, especially how they are entrenched in community. More generally, individualism may prohibit Americans from feeling a sense of togetherness and collective obligation, which is correlated with a lack of political involvement (Eliasoph 1998) and the construction of collective problems as individual troubles (Mills 1959). It also results in the “misrecognition” of our misfortunes as personal troubles rather than societal failures (Lewis 1983; Silva 2011), perpetuating a broken system in need of repair, according to Bellah. For Bellah, there is something wrong with American’s vocabulary of individualism and thus it needs to be reformed by communitarian biblical and republican traditions.

Other sociologists, in the spirit of Durkheim, have argued against moral relativism and instead have argued that sociologists can identify moral truth. For example, Selznick (1992) argues that moral universals exist, like the ideal of human life, prohibiting murder, reciprocity, hospitality to name a few. Moreover, Etzioni (1996) argues that moral truth manifests as intuition. We all agree, Etzioni maintains, that we have higher obligations to our own children than the children of others. No explanation is necessary; such moral truths are obvious. According to Etzioni there are moral truths because some ideas seem morally compelling whereas others do not.

I take a Weberian approach to morality in this dissertation. I focus on how my informants construct and present morality. For example, vegans and activists have different conceptualizations of veganism as a morality, and furthermore, they have different ideas about the morality of presenting their views to others, e.g., ‘veganism should be relayed to the public

using method A over B.’ In my view, morality is a subjective co-creation and sociologists are best suited to examine various manifestations of morality without making assumptions about their ontological status. Moreover, sociologists certainly can question why someone holds a certain moral position and the various consequences of that moral position. The simplest and most grounded way for sociologists to examine morality is to analyze how people within a social context define morality.

Like all of us, I have moral convictions. Yet, contrary to the Durkheimian position, I do not assume, as a sociologist, that moral truth exists, nor am I confident that sociologists have the tools to make such conclusions. The biggest problem with the Durkheimian approach is the epistemological and ontological leaps of faith it requires. How can we assume, as did Durkheim, that morality is basic to the smooth operation of social relations (Tavory 2011)? How do sociologists recognize what is moral from immoral and, more intricately, how could they identify how morality in one society could be immorality in another? The notion that social science could identify moral truth and then suggest proper societal changes suffers from “ethical naturalism” (Hall 1993), which assumes that one can make conclusions about what “ought to be” from what “is,” divorced from a philosophical understanding of morality¹. In other words, while science can help sociologists make conclusions about what is morally right, science cannot tell sociologists what is morally right. Values, belief, ideologies give us a sense of what is right. I do not assume, then, that the vegans and activists in my dissertation are bearers of moral truth. I do not argue that some of my informants have got it right while others do not, as Bellah et al (1985) did. I treat my informants’ morals as accounts.

¹ Selznick (1992) and Etzioni (1996) try to implement philosophical understandings of morality in making sense of what is best for society. However, they rely on rather simplistic understandings, such as intuition. Sociologists have long critiqued common sense as a method of knowledge production (Abend 2008).

In short, there are too many epistemological and ontological issues with the certainty of moral truth that are better left to moral philosophers who are trained to tackle these issues. Sociologists are better off making parsimonious explanations of morality, specifically by focusing on different interpretations of morality. As Abend (2008) argues, it is better for sociologists to assume that something is not true and it turns out to be true, than assuming something is true and it turns out to be false. This means we should not assume moral truth exists given that we cannot empirically verify it to be “true,” at least not very convincingly. However, we can empirically verify that individuals think moral truth is real.

Conclusion

Putting everything together, for matters of morality, animals are good to think with because humans varyingly construct moral meanings through animals. For example, Franklin (1999) argues that there are three ideal types to categorize human attitudes toward animals. First, is the animal rights outlook. Franklin argues that those who support animal rights believe animals should be liberated from humans. They feel everyone should be vegan and avoid animal products and entertainment. They do not keep pets because it demeans animals and denies them freedom. Next is the sentimental outlook, specifically the “Sentimental Welfarist” attitude. They claim to love animals and might have a pet or two. They believe in the humane treatment of animals. They believe it is okay to eat animals, support limited animal experimentation, and enjoy human animal entertainment. Lastly are the Neo-Darwinians who hold an “Instrumental Welfarist” attitude. They do not have sentimental attitudes towards animals, but are self-expressed nature lovers. They feel they have a natural relation with animals. They are concerned about habitat conservation. They prefer outdoor hunting trips to watching animal entertainment,

such as zoos. Each ideal type involves a different moral outlook on human obligations to animals.

Franklin's divergent moralities are also applicable to the animals humans eat, though the moralities often overlap. For instance, at one end of the spectrum are ethical vegans and animal rights activists who argue it is wrong not only to eat animals but to use them. Yet, within this group, there are other voices, like philosopher Peter Singer, who argue that in some cases humans can justify eating animals, as long as the animals' suffering is minimized. And as I will explore, there are also differences within this group about how to present animal ethics to the larger public. In the large American majority are those who eat animals. Again, even within the same category, there is variation. Some individuals eat animals but will only eat "humanely raised animals" out of a concern for animal welfare. It is not the killing of animals that is a problem, but the treatment of animals. These individuals are "compassionate consumers." Then there are those who eat animal products without giving much thought to how the food gets to their table, and perhaps are uninterested in how animals become food. Still within this category are hunters, who may kill animals because they deplore factory farming or value a "natural way of life." Lastly, there are those who participate in overt animal abuse for a variety of reasons, like pleasure (Francione 2000) or demonstrating their adult status (Arluke 2006). These individuals seemingly disregard the value of animal life.

Such a wide spectrum of morality seems distinctive to human views of animals. Though there are variations between societies and most certainly over time, humans do not split each other up into these moral categories in other realms of life. In other words, humans today rarely have debates about the legitimacy of violently harming humans as they do about animals. This, I contend, makes animals good sociological sites of morality. To this end, this dissertation

generally examines how individuals make moral sense of animals. Additionally, chapters three and four on vegans and animal activists respectively explores how each group presents their moral beliefs about animals to others, and how they interpret their situational deployment of morality. Lastly, this dissertation demonstrates how the moral construction of animals has larger sociological significance.

CHAPTER 2

DO ANIMALS HAVE SELVES? ²

Historically, the discipline of sociology has demarcated humans and animals. As far back as Karl Marx, sociologists have differentiated the abilities of animals from humans to view and assess their existential being, with reference to the self. For example, Marx (1992: 328) argued that a human's "species being," the capacity for creativity and production, separated humans from animals. Marx wrote, "Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity." Max Weber, while acknowledging animals may have subjective minds, (1978: 16) claimed in *Economy and Society*, "We either do not have any reliable means of determining the subjective state of mind of an animal or what we have at best is very unsatisfactory." In the context of American and pragmatic social psychology, George Herbert Mead (1934) asserted frankly, "The animal does not think" (1934: 73) and "We put personalities onto animals, but they do not belong to them" (1934: 183). In short, classical sociological thinkers denied or questioned animals' social and cognitive abilities commonly associated with selfhood.

Yet, by the 1980s, sociologists started taking animals more seriously, particularly in the context of animal-human relations. Clifton Bryant (1979: 399), a sociologist who wrote a manifesto on the sociology of human-animal relationships, argued, "(Sociologists) have tended not to recognize, to overlook, to ignore, to neglect, (some critics might say deservedly so) the influence of animals, or their import for, our social behavior, our relationships with other humans, and the directions which our social enterprise often takes." Bryant explored how animals affect human social life, including American language, media, entertainment, and even social problems. By the 1990s, symbolic interactionists Clinton Sanders and Arnold Arluke

² A version of this article was previously published. Ryan Turner. 2013. "Do Animals Have Selves?" *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 40: 425-460

(1993) responded to Bryant's call, but instead of focusing on how animals affect human social formations, they argued that sociologists should examine animal interactions to understand the inner lives of animals, including animal selves. Contrary to classical sociologists, Sanders and Arluke argued that not only are animals thinking beings, but they are also self-aware and even self-presenting actors.

Currently, the literature on animal-human relations in sociology is growing. There are two basic and contrasting themes in the literature: animals as symbolic resources and animals as symbolic actors. In line with Bryant's mandate, sociologists who research animals as symbolic resources focus on how humans use animals to construct identity and community. For example, humans use animals to evaluate their self-worth (Furst 2007), make sense of ethnicity (Jerolmack 2007), manage the disorder and insecurity of a postmodern era (Franklin 1999), enforce racial hierarchies (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 1998; Fine and Christoforides 1991), define social problems (Jerolmack 2008), construct gender (Ramirez 2006), and even position themselves to defend or refute the instrumental use of animals (Groves 1997). In contrast, sociologists who research animals as symbolic actors treat animals as agents. Sociologists in this literature (i.e. Alger and Alger 2003; Irvine 2004; Sanders 1999), argue that animals have selves, which allow animals to interact symbolically with fellow animals and humans through defining situations, taking the role of the other, and understanding the subjective viewpoint of co-interactants. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the sociologists who treat animals as symbolic actors. In particular, I am interested in their claims of animal selves.

Animal selfhood is a provocative idea. But what does animal selfhood look like? How do sociologists know that animals have selves? To answer these questions, I will construct various criteria of human selfhood, based on the works of prominent symbolic interactionists, and

examine how these criteria apply to animals. In laying out these criteria, my goal is not simply to think about animal selves but also about “the self.” This piece, then, concerns both the sociology of animals and the sociology of the self. In particular, it uses a discussion of animal selfhood to think through what sociologists mean by the self when applied to humans.

Throughout this piece, I take a qualified position on animal selfhood. I do not draw a line in the sand and argue that “All animals have selves” or “No animals have selves.” My main argument proceeds in several steps. As a starting point, I argue that animal selfhood may be a meaningful concept as applied to some animals, but that it is unobservable and unverifiable. In addition to this claim, I make four specific arguments. The first two are central to this paper. *First*, whether animals have selves depends on what is meant by “self.” Certain animals may have a self in one sense, but not in another. *Second*, the evidence presented by the animal interaction sociologists of animal selfhood is problematic. I argue that there are epistemological and empirical issues regarding animal selfhood, the most challenging of which is the empirical difficulty of knowing the animal other. Consequently, I urge sociologists of animal-human relations to research animals as symbolic resources. Arguments three and four are less central to this paper, but are important issues in the sociology of animals. *Third*, animals might have selves, but this varies among different animals. While various primates plausibly have selves, insects probably do not. There are many species of animals, some more socially and cognitively sophisticated than others, which makes the claim that “animals have selves” problematic. My *fourth* argument is that the objective of the sociology of animal-human relations, like any subjectivist sociological pursuit, is to make analytical generalizations that transcend animal-human relations in order to contribute to future sociological investigations.

Animal selfhood is not only important in and of itself, but also in terms of its consequences. For example, humans often deny animals rights because animals seemingly do not have sophisticated subjective states like humans, such as self-awareness (Steiner 2005). Yet, there are a handful of sociologists and philosophers who try to demonstrate how animals are self-aware, seemingly to prove this common sentiment wrong. These scholars do not take a value neutral approach to animal selfhood; they argue that if animals have selves, then they also have moral value and therefore humans should not harm them. In other words, they argue that animals have rights in part because they have selves. This makes some sense; if beings are aware of themselves, they likely have an interest in life, and therefore value continued existence over its termination. Rights are a way to protect this interest (Francione 2000). Yet, while animal rights based on self-awareness makes theoretical sense, I contend that it does not make as much empirical sense. That is, the premise of their argument—animal selfhood—is not strong enough to support their conclusion of animal rights. If it is unclear that animals possess selves, then it does not follow that animals have rights based on something they may not possess.

The layout of this paper has five parts. First, I will explore the basic assumptions and arguments of the symbolic interaction literature on animal-human relations. Second, I will unpack the concept of the social self, especially as it has been articulated within the symbolic interaction tradition. Rather than defining the self, a concept too multifaceted to define, I will outline its various criteria of evaluation by addressing the works of Mead, Cooley, Goffman and others. These criteria include attribution of selfhood, self-awareness, intersubjectivity, self-concept/reflexivity, and narration. Third, I will address how animals have selves using these criteria of evaluation, assessing the sociological evidence of animal selfhood. Fourth, I will

examine the significance of animal selfhood, particularly how it relates to the moral worth of animals. Fifth and finally, I discuss future research ideas in the conclusion.

Animals as Symbolic Actors

The fundamental approach animal interaction sociologists (Alger and Alger 2003; Arluke and Sanders 1996; Brandt 2004; Irvine 2004; Sanders 1999; Sanders and Arluke 1993) take towards animals is that they are different from humans in degree rather than kind. This means that most animals are not merely biologic organisms that aimlessly react to stimuli, but are social agents capable of interpreting the situation and subsequently acting with purpose. Animal interaction sociologists argue that animals, like humans although in more elemental ways, are minded social actors who can interact symbolically, interpret and act towards symbols, define situations, take the role of the other, and create intersubjective meaning, all of which indicates that animals possess selves and even culture.

All of this represents an important departure from George Herbert Mead, the writer and thinker to whom many interactionists referred when creating their versions of the self. Mead (1934) argued that humans and animals are qualitatively different beings. He believed humans are rational animals who, unlike any other animals, communicate using significant symbols. In contrast to humans, Mead asserted that animals only communicate via a conversation of gestures, which are thoughtless exchanges lacking self-consciousness and shared meaning. Importantly, Mead claimed that the ability to think is contingent on the ability to use significant symbols. Consequently, he declared that animals cannot think:

The animal does not think. He does not put himself in a position for which he is responsible; he does not put himself in the place of the other person and say, in effect, "He will act in such a way and I will act in this way." If the individual can act in this way... we have meaningful conduct. ...In order that thought may exist there must be symbols, vocal gestures generally, which arouse in the individual himself the response

which he is calling out in the other, and such that from the point of view of that response he is able to direct his later conduct. (Mead 1934: 73).

Despite Mead's insistence that symbols are necessary for thought, animal interaction sociologists argue that thinking does not rely on language use, and therefore, animals are capable of thought. Sociologist Clinton Sanders (1999) argues that animals can think because their intentional awareness directs their future actions. In other words, animals can problem solve to achieve their goals. Examples of such animal thinking include animals using receptive language skills in novel and challenging situations (see Pilley and Reid 2011), animals deceiving others to achieve goals (Strum 1987), animals using tools to acquire food (Weir, Chappell, and Kacelnik 2002), and primates who learn to use money to "buy" what they desired (Wolfe 1936). In addition, animal interaction sociologists' informants—mostly pet owners, but also veterinarians, shelter workers, and trainers—also believe that their animals or the animals with whom they work are thoughtful agents. In contrast to Mead, sociologists who study animals argue that thinking does not derive from language, but is an outcome of social interaction and experience (Arluke and Sanders 1996).

Animal sociologists (Irvine 2004; Sanders 1999) also point out that some animals, mostly primates, can use language. Koko, a lowland gorilla, knows over 1000 American Sign Language signs (Patterson and Linden 1981). Other animals besides primates can also use language. Irene Pepperberg (1991) taught Alex, an African grey parrot, to vocally classify shapes, colors, and forms. Both Koko and Alex show another dimension of thought besides problem solving: the ability to use concepts.

Perhaps more controversial than the agreeable notion that animals can think, animal interaction sociologists also argue that animals symbolically interact with each other and with humans even though most animals cannot use language. In other words, language is not

necessary for symbolic interaction. This argument is a radical deviation from traditional symbolic interactionist thought because symbolic interaction is commonly defined as communication that makes use of significant symbols, primarily language (Blumer 2004: 22). Consequently, symbolic interactionists have typically dismissed animals as symbolic interactants. In fact, Mead (1934) often used animals as negative reference points to make the case for symbolic interaction among humans.

Animal interaction sociologists claim that animals symbolically interact even without language because they act towards things based on the meaning those objects have for them, because the meaning of such objects is a product of social interaction, and because these meanings are outcomes of an interpretive process rather than an involuntary reaction. Symbolic interaction among animals is possible because animals define mutually the situation, or foster a collective agreement on the form, content, and purpose of a particular interaction, and they take the role of the other, or imaginatively see things from the perspective of someone else.

Probably the strongest case for animal symbolic interaction is play. Sanders (2003) argues that animals symbolically designate objects, define situations, and role take during play. In an autoethnographic account, Sanders (from Sanders and Arluke 1993) noted that his two Newfoundland dogs, Emma and Isis, could symbolically interact during a game of “stick.” One of his dogs, usually Emma, would pick out a stick during their walks in the woods. Emma would try to get Isis’ attention by holding her head up, putting her tail high, tensing her body, and directing her gaze towards Isis. Isis would subsequently attempt to take the stick away. According to Sanders, the dogs have defined the situation as playful. Emma and Isis would reverse roles; one dog would be the “holder,” the other would be the “chaser.” This suggests the dogs can take the role of the other. Sanders also claims that his dogs have created rudimentary

rules to this game, as they have agreed that the stick must be held by an end so the chaser has something to bite onto. Reflecting on his dogs playing, Sanders (Sanders and Arluke 1993: 381) concludes, “This would seem to be an interesting example of the symbolic redefinition of a natural object, mutual definition of the situation, ability to take the role of the other, and the sharing of an activity characterized by mutually agreed upon rudimentary rule.” Sanders (2003) also argues that the same properties apply to playful animal-human interactions, which is the primary way animals and humans symbolically interact. During play, both humans and animals define objects and act towards them in a meaningful way, define the situation as playful with certain rules, and take the role of the other.

Animal play is significant because it indicates that animals convey intent and meaning (Bekoff 2006). Animal play does not appear to be a conversation of gestures, during which animals uncontrollably and thoughtlessly respond to the behavior of other animals. Emma and Isis’s play behaviors are arguably forms of metacommunication (Bateson 1972), or signals that denote the meaning of subsequent behaviors. For example, certain bodily gestures, such as a dog’s play bow (Bekoff 2006), are signals of play. In other words, play gestures mean “this is play.” Through play signals, animals are able to communicate their playful intentions to co-interactants. To further complicate matters, animal play is patterned after fighting as it involves biting, scratching, and growling. Yet, animals can successfully distinguish gestures that denote “this is combat” from “this is play” (Bateson 1972). Animals attach a different meaning to a playful bite than a combative bite. For example, a bite no longer stands for an act of aggression when animals play (Bekoff 2006). Playing animals do not quite mean what they “say” in the sense that the signals they exchange in play are untrue, unserious, or not literal (Bateson 1972: 141).

Play further indicates that animals have the capacity for intersubjectivity or shared understandings. Leslie Irvine (2004) argues that animal-animal and human-animal intersubjectivity occurs through the *sharing of intentions*, the *focus of intentions*, and *emotional states*. During play, Irvine argues that animals are capable of sharing their intentions, thereby mutually defining the situation. For instance, when dogs play they respond to each other in ways consistent with play. They are sharing similar intentions. If they did not, then the play interaction would stop. Animals can also share the focus of attention according to Irvine. For instance, on a walk with his dogs, Clinton Sanders noted:

When Emma and Isis look at me, they usually pay attention to my eyes. I have noticed on walks how important looking is to them... If on the walk I stop and look in a particular direction, they will stop, glance at me, and gaze off in the direction I am looking. This seems a fairly clear indication of their elemental ability to put themselves into my perspective. In a literal sense they attempt to assume my "point of view." If I look at something they conclude that it is probably something important (Sanders 1999: 144).

What Sanders was looking at mattered to his dogs and they wanted to share his focus. Finally, Irvine argues that animals are also capable of sharing emotional states with others. According to Irvine, many pet caretakers believe that their dogs and cats are responsive to their feelings. For example, one caretaker, after a terrible day at work, believed his dog recognized his bad mood and in response comforted him (Irvine 2004). Through the sharing of intentions, the focus of intentions, and understanding emotional states, animals and animals as well as animals and humans can foster intersubjective meanings.

Are the works reviewed thus far anthropomorphic, as some skeptics (Hilbert 1994) have claimed? They are to a degree, but this is because describing animals outside of human terms is difficult (Bekoff 2006). When scholars try to avoid anthropomorphism, they present animals as automata, devoid of emotion or feeling. Animal researchers therefore cannot ignore

anthropomorphism. Sanders (1999) and Irvine (2004) argue that they use critical anthropomorphism meaning that they systematically interact with and observe animals to critically understand and describe their behavior. Critical anthropomorphism is analogous to Weber's *verstehen* because both terms explain subjective social action (Irvine 2004).

In summary, the distinction between “behavior” and “action” illuminates the tension between traditional symbolic interactionism and animal symbolic interactionism. Traditional symbolic interactionism, greatly influenced by Mead, is Neo-Cartesian. It enforces an unbridgeable gap between human and animal. Traditional symbolic interactionism posits that animals are products of behavior, not agents of action. Behavior is a mere physical response stemming from environmental or inner-physiological stimuli without understanding, intention, or feeling. Behavior is mindless and unintentional; it is something that happens to animals (Crist 1999). Animals, therefore, live in a world of stimuli that control their behavior. In contrast, animal symbolic interactionism is Neo-Darwinian. This perspective posits that there is evolutionary continuity between human and animal, meaning that the species are more similar than dissimilar. Animals do not merely behave. They act. Action, as opposed to behavior, is accompanied by mental states; it has a subjective meaning. Animal action is therefore mindful, intentional, and meaningful to animals (Crist 1999). Action is something animals do, which suggest that animals live in a world of objects towards which they act. Because the animal interaction sociologists take animals as actors, they argue that animals can think, interact symbolically, role take, and define situations.³ Animals, therefore, are different from humans in degree rather than kind.

³ See Jerolmack, 2009 for a critical analysis of some of these ideas.

One of the most significant claims in the animal symbolic interaction literature is that animals have selves. However, before I evaluate this claim, I will first examine the sociological self. Sociologists, even sociologists who study animals, address the self in many ways. Therefore, in the next section of this paper, I will evaluate the social self as it is understood in symbolic interactionism.

The Sources of the Self

Sociologists refer to the self in multiple ways. The self is a construction (Turner 1976). The self is an object (Mead 1934). The self is a performance (Goffman 1959). The self is a feeling (Cooley 1964). The self is a narrative (McIntyre 1984; Taylor 1989), not even to mention other various distinctions, such as William James' (1890) material and spiritual selves. In this section, I will review the various ways sociologists, mostly symbolic interactionists, have thought about the self. I draw especially on Mead, Blumer, Cooley, and Goffman. From their insights, I will construct five criteria of the self, which I will use to evaluate animal selfhood in the following section. These criteria make up a succession of more demanding standards of selfhood, from the least to the most socially and cognitively complicated. The criteria include attribution of selfhood, self-awareness, intersubjectivity, self-reflexivity/concept, and narration.

Most sociologists who address the self explicitly, particularly symbolic interactionists (Goffman 1959; Turner 1976), argue that individuals do not possess an essential or real self that resides within them. Instead, they argue that the self is an attribution. It is a social product that is influenced by culture and history. Indeed, there are considerable variations from one culture to another in how humans self-describe themselves (Hewitt 1989). In addition, there are also historical variations within societies of the expression of real selves. For example, Ralph Turner

(1976) argues that Americans have experienced a change in self-definitions during the 20th century away from an institutional self to an impulsive self.

Social interaction also shapes the production of the real self. During interaction, a performer and audience collaboratively produce the performer's self. The performer enacts a self before the audience, and if the performance is successful, the audience will attribute this self to the performer. But there is no essence to this self. An essential self did not cause the performance. Rather, actors manage the impressions of others so that they appear to be the kind of social character they are supposed to be. The performed self, therefore, is not a result of our essential being, but is a product of interaction between a performer and audience. In *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959: 252) makes this explicit:

...The self itself does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses. A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation—this self—is a product of a scene that comes off, and it not the *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.

From this perspective, there is no such thing as a real self. Instead, it is, in effect, an illusion that is collectively maintained during interaction.

The attribution of selfhood is most conspicuous when mutuality among interactants is problematic. Attributions of self are more perceptible when individuals define “impoverished interactants” than when they define socially “equal” interactants. For example, family members attribute selves to severely mentally disabled persons (Bogdan and Taylor 1989), and similarly, nursing staff attribute agency to dying nursing residents by asserting that the residents *chose* the circumstances and timings of their death (Rodriquez 2009). The severely disabled persons and

dying nursing residents do not give (any) complex performances of the self, and therefore the family members and nursing staff do more of the interactional work to define them.

Consequently, the caretakers' attributions of self appear obvious, especially to outsiders. For example, laypersons might define dying nursing residents as helpless, yet nurses define them as active beings (Rodriquez 2009). I now present the first—and least restrictive—criterion of selfhood.

Criterion 1: Attribution of Selfhood- Individuals attribute self-characteristics to others during the course of interaction. The meaning of the self is found in these attributions, not in one's inner being. Furthermore, the foundation of this perspective does not rest on mutuality. For example, significant others often attribute "impoverished interactants" selves. Individuals even attribute inanimate objects selves. The self is thus created during the act of defining a self.

In addition to self as an attribution, another sociological approach to the self, influenced by George Herbert Mead (1934), is self as object. In other words, humans have the ability to act towards themselves as objects, meaning that they can refer to or address their selves in an interpretive manner. Mead argued that the self becomes an object to itself when an individual views his or her self from the perspective of significant and generalized others. Through this process of self-objectification, humans develop self-awareness. Mead's student, Herbert Blumer (1969; 2004), also argued that the self is an object to itself, but stressed self-interaction more than Mead. In other words, individuals can act towards themselves as they act towards others. For example, I can become angry with myself, feel proud of myself, have conceptions of myself, set goals for myself, talk about myself, talk to myself, all of which involve self-interaction. To have a self means that one is able to become the object of one's own actions.

In the process of becoming an object to oneself, Mead (1934) stressed temporality, cooperative action, and self-control. I will use Mead's "game stage" to illuminate these points.

During a baseball game, children show temporality—one's ability to imagine one's self in particular sequences of action—when they take the role of the generalized other to interpret their future lines of action. For example, when a batter hits a baseball, the players must know how the other players are going to respond to know how to proceed. The players can imagine themselves in particular sequences of action in which they play an active and dynamic role in conjunction with other selves - 'if the ball is hit here, my teammates should respond this way, and I will accordingly respond.' Moreover, as this example demonstrates, the children partake in cooperative action—the enjoinder of the self with co-interactants towards a common objective—during the game. The children's cooperation depends on each player taking generalized attitudes, such as the role of the whole team, rules of the game, and notions of sportsmanship, towards themselves. Complex coordination is thus possible because the children make indications to themselves regarding how they should act in relation to their teammates. The children therefore exert control over their conduct and take themselves into account when they act.

The generalized other, made up of the social attitudes of one's group, gives the self its unity. Mead (1934) argued that the self does not fully develop through an individual merely taking of the attitudes of others towards the self. Rather, the self fully develops once an individual takes the social attitudes of her organized social group towards her self and her conduct. When taking the role of the generalized other, individuals become aware of themselves within a larger normative group context, shaping how they think of themselves and act in a given situation. They become self-conscious members of their community.

One must be aware of the self in order to view and act towards the self as an object. If a being is not aware of some object, then the being cannot indicate and direct action towards it.

Under this premise, here is the second criterion of selfhood:

Criterion 2: Self Awareness- In the most elemental sense, a being has a self if said being is aware of oneself. A being achieves self-awareness when the subjective self becomes an object to itself. Individuals achieve self-objectification through two means, both of which are mutually constitutive. First, an organism becomes an object to (and therefore aware) of itself by taking the attitudes of significant and generalized others towards oneself, which shapes the organism's behavior and self-experience. Second, an organism becomes an object to itself when interacting (i.e., conversing) with oneself. Both forms of self-objectification involve an "I" and a "Me." When a being takes the attitudes of others towards oneself, the "I" is influenced by and responds to the "Me." When a being interacts with oneself, the "I" and the "Me" have a conversation.

Sociologists have also argued that the self is a performance that is shaped by status, roles, and social situations (see Goffman 1959). In Goffman's (1959) account of social interaction, the self is an active agent which attempts to influence how others will respond to the self's performance. Agents intentionally or unintentionally present themselves in numerous ways to manage their audience's impressions. They can present their categorical social identities to their audience, like gender, familial status, age, occupation, etc. They can also present a distinctive, personal self behind those social identities. Actors can successfully control their audiences by making the audience believe in the part they are playing. In turn, the audience will try to acquire information about the performer, such as her social or personal characteristics, to interpret how they should act towards this person. The audience expects the actor's social statuses and distinctive characteristics to fit with her conduct. If the actor seemingly gives a sincere performance, the audience will attribute the self presented to the performer. Through this working consensus, the actor and audience mutually create and uphold a self.

However, performances do not always go smoothly. They can become problematic, jeopardizing the presented self. For example, a performer might make a controversial or embarrassing comment. In response, the performer and audience adapt to this interactional disruption. The performer may use defensive tactics to protect his own projections, and/or the audience may try to save the actor's presentation of self through protection practices or tact. The performance may also be spoiled when the audience believes the performer is being insincere. For example, a dinner guest may tell her host she enjoyed dinner, but the host can use the guest's expressions given off, such as how quickly the food is raised to the guest's mouth, to evaluate the guest's expression given (Goffman 1959: 7). The guest, aware she is being monitored by the host, will calculatingly attempt to convey to the host that she enjoyed the meal through her presentation of self. In such a case, the co-interactants participate in an "information game" of concealment and search (Goffman 1959: 8).

While Goffman (1959) presents the self as an intentional and strategic actor (an "I"), he views the performed self as a collective product of interaction. A self is not simply enacted by a performer, but it is evaluated by its audience. The self and its audience intersubjectively produce the performed self during immediate interactions as they collectively define the situation. Stated otherwise, the self that emerges during interaction is a collectively constructed self, as the actor and audience "work together" to define the actor. An actor's self presentation coincides with the self that the audience attributes to the actor (Cahill 1998). Following these considerations, my third criterion of selfhood is:

Criterion 3: Intersubjectivity- Performer and audience intersubjectively create the self during interaction. The self is collaboratively manufactured when a person who enacts a self before an audience is accorded that self by audience members. Overall, the self and audience, acting together, contribute to a single definition of the situation, producing some sort of interactional agreement about the self

presented. Unlike Criterion 1, agents must share similar interactional abilities under this perspective.

In addition to self as object and self as intersubjective performance, sociologists have also argued that the self is a *feeling* that is influenced by our interactions with others and by larger social categories. This view of the self is particularly influenced by Charles Horton Cooley (1964), who argued that the self is our imagined ideas of what others think of us. His idea of a “looking glass self” is well known:

The self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. The thing that moves us to pride or shame is the imagined effect of this reflection upon another’s mind. (Cooley 1964: 184)

What evokes a self-feeling is not the mere reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, or how we think others judge us. We view ourselves based on our interpretations of how others evaluate us. The meaning of the self is thus indirect because how we think and act towards our self is understood through the way others act towards it. In other words, self-definitions are heavily influenced by social definitions.

Furthermore, self-feelings are also influenced by how well individuals conform to normative standards, such as cultural expectations. For example, a low-income father who is unable to become his family’s breadwinner feels he is a failure because he imagines that his friends and family see him as such (Griswold 1994). This example demonstrates that how others evaluate us, and therefore how we feel about ourselves, is heavily influenced by normative categories that are independent of the intentions and characteristics of individuals.

Under criterion 4, the self is a feeling, which involves the ability to reflect on oneself, thereby producing a self-concept.

Criterion 4: Self-concept/reflexivity- Beings who are self-reflexive are able to interpret what others think of them by objectifying the self from the others' perspectives. When self-reflective beings imagine how others evaluate them, they produce their self-concept, or their assessment of self on the basis of social evaluations. These social evaluations are shaped by larger normative characteristics, such as cultural expectations, gender roles, etc.

Finally, sociologists, although not from the symbolic interactionist tradition, have thought of the self as a narrative (McIntyre 1984; Taylor 1989). The self is a discursive construction, which individuals communicate and experience in everyday life through storytelling (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). The self expressed through narrative is always an emergent process that individuals tell, retell, and modify over time (Hewitt 2003). The narrative self, therefore, is an actor (storyteller) and malleable product (story).

Individuals tell stories about themselves for various reasons, including self-presentation and self-approval. Persons convey their stories to others to present seemingly unique selves, and they also tell their stories to others and to themselves to account for their actions. In brief, individuals tell self stories to make sense of their lives. Humans use narratives to produce coherent, continuous, and consistent selves (Irvine 1999; Mason-Schrock 1996).

While narrators pick and choose stories and how to tell them, their stories of self are bounded by culturally available models of self-narration (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). In other words, narratives of self are not purely an individual accomplishment. They are constrained by social situations, group membership, and larger cultural forms. These constraints affect the available discourse in a particular setting for self-construction, and the probability that an audience will accept an individual's story (Hewitt 2003). However, symbolic interactionists (Irvine 1999; Mason-Schrock 1996) argue that narrative constraints do not determine the structure and content of self narratives, but are resources that individuals use to convey an

individually and collectively meaningful self. For instance, localized group cultures provide members resources for the construction of an intelligible self, such as transsexuals' narrative of a "true self" (Mason-Schrock 1996).

The creation and maintenance of acceptable narratives of self is therefore a community effort. Communities create culture, which provide members resources for the construction of self (Mason-Schrock 1996). Within a community, life stories must mesh so that tellers and listeners share "some deep structure about the nature of a life" (Bruner 2004: 699). Life stories are therefore only meaningful in the context of other life stories. Indeed, the narratives of any life are associative, as they part of a larger interconnected web of narratives (McIntyre 1984). Individuals are consequently never more than the co-authors of their narratives. I now present my last criterion of selfhood:

Criterion 5: Narration- The self is a story we tell to others and ourselves about who we are. Telling stories about the self implies that one is aware of oneself, that the self is an intersubjective creation as other individuals shape one's narrative, and that one is reflecting on one's self either in the backstage where we tell stories about ourselves to ourselves, or on the frontstage where we tell our stories to others. Furthermore, how a person's narrative is received by audiences—its intelligibility and believability—shapes one's self-concept. A good self story—one in line with local narrative conventions—is likely to be well received by an audience, positively shaping one's self-concept. Self-narrative, therefore, involves self-awareness, intersubjectivity (i.e. narrative resources and narrative webs), and self-reflexivity/concept.

In summary, my five criteria have addressed two major ways that sociologists typically address the self (see Callero 2003). First, sociologists refer to the personal self (Mead 1934; Cooley 1964), which I emphasized in criterion 2 (self-awareness), 4 (self-concept), and 5 (narration) of this paper. The personal self is a cognitive ability fostered by the social. Sociologists who study the personal self analytically focus on the social constitution of reflexive self-awareness, such as how social experiences influence self-understandings, self-meanings, and

self-images (Cahill 1998; Callero 2003). Under this perspective, the self is a human universal, as all social humans have the ability to act towards themselves. The other sociological approach to selfhood is the public self, a self that is known and visible to others (i.e., Goffman 1959), which I highlighted in criterion 1 (attribution of self), 3 (intersubjectivity), and 5 (narration) of this paper. Sociologists who refer to the public self focus on the social construction of socially defined acting persons as they give performances, accounts, and narratives of their distinct selves. Under this perspective, the self is not a bounded quality of an individual because the production of the self is contingent on immediate situations and larger social forces (see Goffman 1959 and Turner 1976). These two perspectives, of course, are not mutually exclusive. For example, our personal selves, in particular our self-concept, are shaped by our public performances. Nevertheless, the conceptual focus on each approach is different. Sociologists who refer to the self as reflexive self-awareness are evoking ideas of the personal self, whereas sociologists who focus on the social production of individual characteristics are evoking the public self.⁴

How does animal selfhood stack up against the five criteria of the self that I have constructed? In the next section, I will evaluate the evidence of animal selfhood using these criteria. Afterwards, I will evaluate the animal interaction sociologists' specific claims of animal selfhood.

Thinking about Animal Selfhood: An Overview and Evaluation

By my first criterion, self as attribution, animals clearly have selves. Human caretakers often ascribe certain selfhood characteristics to their pets, such as distinct personalities, personal

⁴ See Cahill (1998). He argues that Goffman (1959) actually was not examining the self. Rather, Cahill argues that Goffman's focus was on the person. The self for Cahill is a reflexive self awareness of one's agency and identity, whereas the person is "a socially defined, publicly visible embodied being" (p. 135).

tastes, emotions, cognitive abilities, and personal history narratives (Alger and Alger 2003; Sanders 1999). For example, Janet and Steven Alger's (2003) study of cat owners and Clinton Sanders' (1999) research of dog owners revealed that caretakers thought of their pets as unique individuals who possessed distinctive personalities varying in temperament, demeanor, playfulness, talkativeness, and intelligence. For example, one of the Alger's informants described her cat:

Jasmine is a tomboy. If she were human, she would wear blue jeans and get dirty. She is defiant and strong-willed for a kitten. She has a very colorful personality. She'll scream at you if she doesn't like what you are doing. (Alger and Alger 2003: 16)

Similarly, one of Sanders' (1999) informants described her dog as attention-seeking and loving:

Ricky really likes getting attention and she seeks it. But if you're not willing to give it to her, she'll go find something else to entertain herself. She's bold, she's aggressive. At the same time she is affectionate- willing to take what you give her (Sanders 1999: 26)

In addition, caretakers regularly spoke of their animal companions as persons with distinct personal tastes including food, activities, playthings, and people. One of Alger and Alger's (2003: 17) informants said that his cat, Alfonse, likes "peas and lima beans and corn."

Likewise, here is one of Sanders' informants describing her Doberman's love of rocks:

She just loves rocks... She just loves big rocks; the bigger the better. When she finds a new one she is so happy she howls. She'll lie and chew them all day. She puts them in her water bucket and sometimes it takes two hands to get them out (Sanders 1999: 27).

Caretakers also believed that their pets were empathetic and emotional and could display emotions such as love, joy, sadness, fear, jealousy, and anger. One of Sanders' informants described her puppy's anger after she left him alone at home:

It's funny, usually after I have been at work all Friday I don't go out unless I am sure that somebody is going to watch him. But one time I left him alone and when I got home, HE WAS ANGRY (emphasis in original). He just let me know. He'd follow me around and he would look up at me and he would just bark. It was like he was yelling at me. And I would say, 'What is it with you?' and when I would stop talking he would look at me and bark—like 'You left me here. How could you do that?' You could read it in his face (Sanders 1999: 20).

Caretakers moreover thought of their pets as minded social actors. They believed that their pets could think through situations and solve problems. For example, a dog owner believed her dog, Toby, thought of "trade" during dinner. Toby loves butter, and he gets a little restless when his caretakers leave it on the dinner table out of his reach. According to his caretaker:

Toby thought through the problem of how to get the bread and butter... We hear him rummaging around the house, up and down the stairs, until he finally appeared with a treasure: a roasted pig ear... Toby is allowed to take one out of the box each day. He had obviously hidden this one. He laid it down at my feet. Naturally Toby received a piece of bread with slabs of butter. Toby reasoned and came up with the idea of trade (Sanders 1999: 127)

Finally, pet owners attributed individuality to their pets through telling their narrative history, such as how they acquired their animal companion. One of Sanders' informants emphasized the personal history of his dog, Fred:

... I had had a few beers so we stopped by the side of the road so I could take a leak. I was standing there and this puppy runs up. I thought that there must be someone around so I called and called but no one answered. We decided to just go ahead and take him with us. Every time we stopped at the shore I let him out and he ran off. But when we got back to the car there he was waiting for us. I figured it was fate—I was destined to have a dog. (Sanders 1999: 28)

In summary, through their daily interactions and familiarity with their animals, caretakers attributed unique qualities to their pets. In doing so, they constructed their pets as beings with distinct selves. Although caretakers do not use the language of self, they do use a closely related language and rhetoric of personality. Personality is a way caretakers talk about selfhood.

Although I will elaborate on this in the next section, I submit that criterion 1 is a weak standard of selfhood. The point is not that animals have distinct personalities, tastes, feelings, and personal histories, but that pet owners believed dogs and cats had them. In other words, the animal interaction sociologists' evidence for distinct animal selves is not an objective reality of animal selves, but is an attribution of thought. Moreover, these selves are meaningless to animals because they are human creations. Animals do not and cannot act towards their "essential self" because it is not an object to them. Thus, animals do not have a *notion of a distinct, unique self*. Furthermore, both flora and inanimate objects can also have selves by this standard, which means that even objects that unquestionably lack self-consciousness can have a "self." Let us now examine criterion 2, self-awareness.

Although the animal interaction sociologists do not make this argument explicitly, animal interaction is one way to gauge animal self-awareness. As I have described, the animal interaction sociologists argue that animal interaction, particularly play, seemingly transcends Mead's (1934) conversation of gestures, as it involves minded behavior, role taking, defining the situation, metacommunication, and intersubjectivity. Play interactions therefore have implications for animal selfhood. Sanders (1999) and Irvine (2004) argue that animals engaged in play take into account the mutually defined play situation, including the actions of others. In other words, *animals indicate things to themselves* from the perspectives of co-interactants and the situation in order to construct lines of action. The animal self, therefore, is an object to itself from the attitudes of others.

If Sanders and Irvine are correct, they still have a ways to go before showing that animals have full fledged selves in a Meadian sense. Animal play is possibly an example of Mead's play stage, involving rudimentary aspects of temporality and coordination. However, animal play

does not extend in the complex coordination of the game stage. In other words, Sanders and Irvine's account of animal play does not employ a generalized other, which Mead felt was necessary for one to fully become an object to one's self in conjunction with others.

Yet, there is also reason to believe that Sanders and Irvine are incorrect. While the connection between animal play and the self is reasonable, it is also speculative. If animals make indications to themselves from the perspectives of others, I submit that they must possess a theory of mind, which is the capacity to infer others' mental states such as their thoughts and feelings (Gergely 1994). Although he does not use "theory of mind," Sanders (1999) argues that animals assume the perspective of others when they role take. For example, his dogs will frequently share the focus of attention, as if they each think to themselves, "He is looking at something. What is he looking at?" I would argue, however, that the dogs' mutual gaze is joint attention but not necessarily *shared attention* (Povinelli and Prince 1998). Even though the dogs are gazing at the same object, they are probably not aware of each other's intentional focus on the object; the gaze is not shared. Gaze following in social mammals may have evolved as a means of averting danger rather than understanding the minds of others.⁵ Therefore, Sanders' dogs may not assume each other's point of view, but fairly automatically respond to sudden shifts in each other's head movements and gazes (Povinelli and Prince 1998). My point is that during animal interactions, animals may not make indications to themselves from the perspectives of others. This would require them to wonder what other beings are thinking before they act, which, as I will elaborate on in the following section, may not be empirically verifiable. Let us now examine the animal interaction sociologists' detailed and thoughtful claims of animal self-awareness.

⁵ See Povinelli and Prince 1998. They argue that even primates, particularly chimps, do not possess a theory of mind even though primates follow the gazes of others.

Sociologists Janet and Steven Alger (2003) conducted ethnographic research at a cat shelter, during which they searched for evidence of feline self-awareness. They argue that animals are self-aware using five criteria, all of which they applied to the shelter cats they studied. First, animals are self-conscious because they can adapt to novel circumstances or find solutions to new problems. Alger and Alger (2003), for example, argue that the shelter cats resolved the issue of shelter overcrowding by resorting to intimacy. Second, animals are self-aware because they can learn from others and their own experiences. In the shelter, Alger and Alger claim the cats learned from each other through role taking, by which the cats understood that fighting and territoriality were intolerable behaviors. Third, animals are self-aware because they have the ability to make choices in situations that provide more than one course of action. For example, the shelter provided the cats with many different types of foods and sleeping areas, and the cats consistently chose certain foods and sleeping arrangements, indicating that they made choices among many options. Fourth, animals are self-aware because they have the ability to cooperate. Cooperation in the cat shelter manifested when newly arrived cats acclimated to their surroundings with the helping paws of current cat residents. Alger and Alger assert that the shelter cats attempted to comfort and befriend the new cats, which helped the new cats adjust to shelter life. Finally, animals are self-aware because they possess an overall complexity of behavior. According to Alger and Alger, cat life at the shelter was very complex. In fact, they claim that the cats developed a culture, defined as the particular adaptations that cats made to their living conditions, which were transmitted to the new cats at the shelter. This culture possessed certain norms, sanctions, and roles. The most significant norm of this culture was affection and solidarity. When any cats broke this norm through fighting or territoriality, other

cats stopped their disruptive behavior. However, the cats usually upheld their norms through positive sanctions, such as cuddling or other forms of affection.

According to the Alger and Alger (2003), the shelter cats' complexity of behavior—their culture—signifies feline self-awareness. As broad as these claims are, they do, however, fall short of what Mead meant by self-awareness, which is becoming an object to oneself. Even their second criterion, learning from others, which seems closest to self-awareness, does not qualify in Mead's sense because there is no evidence that the cats actually objectify themselves when they are influenced by other cats.⁶ In addition, it is plausible that the alleged learned behaviors, such as lack of territoriality and fighting, were not cultural but were ecological. In other words, the human controlled conditions of the shelter (the physical layout, constant food and water supply, spayed and neutered cats) produced certain behaviors in the cats, such as lack of conflict. Under an ecological perspective, there is no need to assume that the cats learned norms and values from each other. There is no need to assume the self or culture. Instead, using an ecological explanation, one can posit that the cats individually adapted to the human controlled conditions of the shelter, producing certain patterns of feline behavior.

In addition to Alger and Alger (2003), Leslie Irvine (2004; 2007) also argues that animals have selves, specifically an "I" or what she calls a core self. She uses literature on infant selfhood to make the case for animal selves, because the core self of both an infant and an animal is not contingent on language use. Borrowing from William James, Irvine (2004) argues that there are four central characteristics to the core, subjective self: agency, coherence, affectivity, and self-history. Irvine argues that these characteristics of animal selves become visible to humans during interaction. Humans can know the selves of animals because animals reaffirm

⁶ I will discuss the problem of evidence in the next section.

human subjectivities. Importantly, these elements of the self are also criteria of animal self-awareness. These characteristics make animals aware of the “I.”

How do the features of core selfhood foster animal self-awareness? First, Irvine (2004) claims that animals have *agency*, which she defines as the capacity for self-willed action and self-control. Agentic beings are aware of their desires and intentions, which they act on and have control over. Irvine claims that dog training is the strongest evidence for animal agency. Dog trainers demand that their dogs exercise self-control. This implies that a dog has a sense that he or she can initiate action, because to control one’s self means one has a sense of will. *Only agentic beings have self-control*. Sanders’ (1999) research on guide dogs is another possible example of animal agency, specifically self-willed action. When a guide dog is ordered to cross a busy street but does not cross because of traffic, the dog appears to make a choice among several plans of action, indicating a sense of volition. They are, more or less, aware of their ability to act and they therefore decide to construct a certain line of action. I would also add that animal agency implies that animals are not merely instinctual beings. If animals can control their behavior and choose among several plans of action, then instinct—unthinking and uncontrollable responses—cannot always explain animal behavior.

Animals also possess *coherence*, the awareness that their selves are single, bounded, physical entities. In other words, animals understand that they are embodied entities, which allows animals to distinguish themselves from others and therefore recognize distinct others. According to Irvine (2004), forms and hiding are two examples of coherence in animals. She argues that animals can recognize and distinguish forms because animals are coherent beings. Using dogs to make her case, Irvine argues that dogs recognize and discriminate between humans based on their social experiences with them. For example, dogs will greet their owner

coming home from work differently than a bugler. Or, when dogs recognize a person, they might wag their tail or growl depending on their experience with this person. Hiding is another indicator of coherence among animals. Irvine argues that animals hide because they have a sense of self as a bounded physical object. In addition, Clinton Sanders (1999) cites research of animals hiding from predators as evidence of an embodied self. For example, grizzly bears hide from human hunters to observe them. Bears also purposefully avoid leaving tracks in order to evade human hunters. This means, according to Sanders, that bears are aware of themselves in relation to others.

Coherence is an important characteristic of selfhood because it gauges a sense of a bounded self, distinct from other selves. However, Irvine fails to show how animals have a self-reflective sense of oneness. An animal's recognition of others does not mean this animal is aware of or reflecting on one's self. Self-other differentiation and recognition is part of an organism's biological apparatus. It exists so that an organism can survive and is not predicated on self-awareness (Lewis 1994). "Even T-cells can recognize and differentiate themselves from foreign proteins" (Lewis 1994: 22). Irvine and Sanders, however, do raise an interesting point about animals hiding from others. This might demonstrate that animals are thinking, "You can't see me" suggesting they are aware of themselves as objects. But while this seems plausible, it also seems speculative. The relationship between hiding and self-awareness is unclear, but this does not mean scholars cannot construct logical explanations. Sociologists and ethologists first have to address why animals hide before it is linked to self-awareness. Ultimately, I am unconvinced that forms and hiding give animals a sense of self or a reflective sense of how their endeavors "are very much part of them" (Irvine 2004: 133).

Irvine (2004) also argues that animals have *affectivity* or the capacity for emotions. Irvine argues that animals possess two types of feelings: categorical and vitality affects. Categorical affects are particular emotions, such as when an animal feels happy or sad during a specific instance. Vitality affects are not particular emotions, but are general characteristics of individual animals, i.e. “My dog is frisky.” Irvine claims that when humans describe an animal’s vitality affects, they are referring to an animal’s subjective self. In other words, humans do not simply give animals emotions and subjectivities, but recognize such self-characteristics in animals. However, I would argue that in order to demonstrate the relationship between emotions and the self, sociologists cannot merely state that animals have emotions. Sociologists must present evidence of *self-conscious emotions* in animals such as embarrassment, envy, empathy, pride, and shame. Self-conscious emotions require animals to take the role and the other and act towards themselves from that perspective, producing a self-feeling.

Finally, animals have *self-history* or continuity of experience. Irvine (2004) uses veterinarian visits as examples of self-history. Irvine notes that most dogs seem to know and are fearful about going to the veterinarian. This is because dogs remember their previous visits. They are able to consistently trigger a particular emotion for a specific setting, implying that animals possess not only memory but also a sense of continuity. However, sometimes animals become desensitized to veterinarian visits. A dog who is scared during his first veterinarian visit may feel more comfortable during subsequent visits. Yet, Irvine argues that animals still have continuous selves even when their behaviors change in specific settings. This is because animals change over time as they acquire new abilities and confront new opportunities. Thus, while animal selves persist throughout time, they are not stagnant. In brief, Irvine argues that animals have self-histories or continuous selves because they remember what happened to them in the past,

and because they largely stay the same selves over time. However, I would argue that there is a difference between memory, which some animals clearly have, and self-history, which some animals might not have because it implies memory of oneself. An animal's memory of a veterinarian visit is different from an animal's *memory of self* at the veterinarian. In order to demonstrate self-history in animals, sociologists must demonstrate how animals have memories of their selves, and how memory of oneself is distinguishable from memory.

In summary, Irvine argues that during human-animal interactions, an animal's agency, coherence, affectivity, and self-history—an animal's subjective self—become apparent to the animal and to humans. Animals are aware of their ability to act upon the world. They are aware that they are coherent selves distinct from other selves. They are aware of their history and use this history to make sense of themselves in future situations. Through interacting with pets, caretakers recognize these self-properties in their pets too. Yet, this is an incomplete version of selfhood using my criteria. Next, I will consider criterion 3, the intersubjective construction of self.

There is not much evidence for animal selves as intersubjective constructions. While Irvine (2004) argues that humans and animals can achieve intersubjectivity, her focus is on shared thoughts, feelings, and intentions between human and animal. For example, many of Irvine's informants felt that their pets were sensitive to their moods. In contrast, I am using intersubjectivity to specifically show how the self is a collective construction in the spirit of Goffman.

Animal interaction sociologists might argue that my first criterion, self as attribution, should actually fall under this criterion. A human caretaker and animal companion "work together" to define the animal's self. The animal displays her distinct characteristics to others.

The human caretaker, in turn, recognizes the animal's self, and may even reject the animal's "performance" (i.e. "My dog is not being herself today"). The animal's self, therefore, is an intersubjective creation. But this approach seems inaccurate, at least using Goffman's framework, because animals do not knowingly present their "selves" to their human caretakers in an attempt to manage their impressions. My dog might try to make me feed him or take him for a walk, but I cannot think of any case when he has tried to manage my image of him, especially since he is presumptively unaware of any symbolic framework (i.e., identity, role) that he can use to present a normative image of a dog. In short, animals do not act with the intent and ambition that Goffman assigns to humans.

While the production of intersubjective selves among animals is problematic, I still want to think through a rudimentary case: social animal dominance hierarchies (Sanders 1999). An animal's status within the hierarchy is governed by his relationships. In primate groups, status depends on family ties, such as parent-child relationships, and friendship bonds. For instance, primates whose parents are high-ranking will also possess high status. However, primate status is not simply determined by relationships but also by interactions with others. During interactions, primates recognize their own status (an indication that they are self-aware) in relation to the status of other primates. For example, a high status primate challenges a low status primate for food. He presents his high status to another primate through aggression. The low status primate recognizes the challenger as high status and, in turn, submits and relinquishes the food to him. The self presented is in line with the self accorded; it is an intersubjective accomplishment. Conspecifics, however, do not always accept self-presentations of high status individuals. Challenges to status thus ensue. If the "high status" primate loses to the "low status" one, then there is a change in the overall status hierarchy, which primates subsequently use to determine

how they should act towards other group members. In other words, the primate selves are intersubjective creations that are constantly defined and redefined during interactions.

Skeptics might argue that biological characteristics, such as age, strength, and size determine which animals are dominant and which are submissive. But these characteristics alone do not determine rank. What matters is how well animals *perform* these characteristics. For example, an alpha chimpanzee might appear larger than others, but this is because he is puffing himself out and walking in an exaggerated way, whereas others make themselves look low or small when they interact with him (Martin 2009). In fact, the alpha male might actually be smaller than the other chimps in his group. Thus, there are social elements to dominance orders: hierarchies are primarily determined by networks of relationships, they are interactional accomplishments that subsequently shape how primates act towards others, and, at least among primates, they encompass rudimentary performances of ranking.

Sociologist John Levi Martin (2009: 119) further argues that animals in dominance hierarchies understand their standing in relation to the whole group. He asserts, "...it is impossible to explain the actions of animals of more intelligent and social species unless we posit that they have some sense of not only their own position vis-à-vis other animals, but of the order as a whole." Stated otherwise, animals in dominance orders view themselves as objects from the perspective of significant others *and the larger social order*. If such animals have a conception of the larger animal community, these animals can conceivably take the role of the generalized other. These animals, therefore, have a "Me" in addition to their "I," which in Mead's formulation suggests that these animals have a complete self. Social animal dominance hierarchies thus rudimentarily indicate that the self—an animal's recognition of her social

standing from the perspective of significant and generalized others—is intersubjectively created and recreated during interaction.

The intersubjective creation of self among primates indicates that primates might also possess a self-concept, which brings us to criterion 4. Self-concept is the relationship between self-assessment and social evaluations. A primate may possess a self-concept if she can assess her self in relation to others. In one sense, a primate's self-concept could be informed by her interactions with low or high status primates. For example, a low ranking primate may feel some sort of negative self-feeling when interacting with a high status primate. However, this notion of a self-concept is limited for two reasons. First, scholars would need to empirically demonstrate that animals are capable self-feelings in conjunction with other selves. Second, animals are limited in communicating how they evaluate each other. Social evaluations often have complex symbolic meanings. Animals would have to understand certain evaluative concepts—such as laziness, intelligence, humor, attractiveness, success, weirdness, etc.—in order to apply them to their own self-assessments. These concepts are human ones, and it is doubtful that they apply to animals. For example, while animals have intelligence, at least from the perspective of humans, there is no evidence that animals can comprehend the meaning of intelligence and use it to evaluate others or apply it to their own self-image. While being self-aware may not rely on language use, it is more likely that a self-concept does.

Furthermore, a self-concept presupposes larger symbolic structures, such as race, gender, sexuality, etc. These structures shape how others evaluate us and subsequently how we view ourselves. This implies that in order for animals to have a self-concept, they must at the very least have certain normative group expectations that shape how they evaluate each other and themselves. While Alger and Alger (2003) argued that cat interactions were governed by the

cats' normative expectations of friendship and affection, they did not consider how the cats assessed themselves when they violated or even followed these expectations.

Finally, there is no explicit evidence that animals possess selves under criterion 5, which is narration. This criterion, the strongest criterion of selfhood I am considering here, requires language, so it is unsurprising that animals cannot tell stories about themselves. Animals can have "narrative selves" most palpably when their caretakers construct narratives for them, which I discussed under criterion 1, attribution of self. While most animals do not have the ability to construct their own stories linguistically, some animals might be capable of telling stories about themselves using either spoken or sign language. Consider this exchange between Koko, a gorilla who communicates using American Sign Language, and her trainer/companion, Penny Patterson (Patterson and Cohn 1994: 282):

Penny: What did you do to Penny?

Koko: Bite.

Penny: You admit it?

Koko: Sorry bite scratch.

Koko: Wrong bite.

Penny: Why bite?

Koko: Because mad.

Penny: Why mad?

Koko: Don't know.

Koko seems to be saying, 'I am sorry I bit you. I realize that was wrong, but I was angry.' Is Koko telling a story here? A typical narrative has a connection between one event and another, has a temporal order (beginning, middle, and end), and has some sort of conclusion that projects a desirable or undesirable future (Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes 2011). Koko and Patterson's exchange has a connection among events as they both respond to each other in

intelligible ways. Their exchange has a temporal order; it starts with a demand for a confession, proceeds with an apology, and ends with an account of self. Their exchange also has a moral conclusion. Although Koko is unsure why she bit Patterson, she is sure that it is wrong to bite. Perhaps the moral of the story is, “It is wrong to bite people.”

Koko clearly does not show the complexity with which humans narrate their lives. She cannot tell her complete life story. Nor is it likely that she tells her life story to make sense of her life. But she can tell simple narratives of self. Without laboring the details, Koko also shows dimensions of self-awareness, intersubjectivity, and self-concept. However, American Sign Language primates are outliers compared to other animals, since most animals cannot use sign language. Symbolic primate selves, therefore, should not be generalized to all animals.

The Sociological Claims of Animal Selfhood: A Critique

While the sociological claims of animal selfhood are convincing at times, especially evidence for intersubjectivity, self-concept, and narrative among primates, I find that many claims suffer from clear epistemological and empirical problems concerning the human knowledge of animal selfhood. Since the animal interaction sociologists mostly focus on my first and second criteria of animal selfhood, attribution of self and self-awareness respectively, I will spend most of this section evaluating these forms of animal selfhood. Given the conceptual problems with animal selfhood, I also question whether scholars should make the case the animals have rights on inconclusive empirical evidence.

Criterion 1 is the attribution of self. In the symbolic interactionist literature on animal-human relations, humans clearly attribute distinct personal qualities or selves to their pets (Sanders 1999; Alger and Alger 2003; Irvine 2004). The animal interaction sociologists, however, are too willing to interpret this data as evidence of (real) animal selves, rather than

evidence of human accounts of animal selves. These scholars are making claims about the essence of animals in relation to how humans define and subsequently act towards them. In fact, Clinton Sanders (1999) argues that everyday pet owners are like folk ethologists who, through their familiarity with their pets, know what their pets are really like. However, there are two epistemological problems with this approach: one is animal-focused and the other human focused.

First, as already stated, there is no way sociologists can demonstrate that animals have a notion of a distinct self. While I might think my cat is frisky, my cat does not have this self-notion since “frisky” is a human created object she cannot act towards. Second, there is a distinction between human interpretations of animal subjectivities and animal subjectivities. The animal interaction sociologists blur this distinction as they take human accounts of animals as essences of animals.⁷ In contrast, I submit that the units of analysis are humans, not animals. Sociologists, therefore, can use human accounts of animals to make claims about what humans think of animals, but they cannot use these accounts to make claims about animals. I thus argue that this literature does not inform readers about animal subjectivity and selfhood, but how humans, both the researchers and informants, construct animal subjectivities. This is because human constructions of animals are more readily attainable and interpretable than animal subjectivities.

Human accounts of animals should not constitute evidence of animal selves because human interpretations of animal subjectivities are historically and culturally mediated. Animal

⁷ This approach defies traditional symbolic interactionism because it assumes objects have a certain essence or truth value, something symbolic interactionists rarely consider. Most interactionists are primarily concerned with how actors define and act towards objects and not the core properties of the objects (See Hewitt 2003). Indeed, if objects are cultural and interactional products, they have no essence.

subjectivities are therefore contextual and cultural products, not objective realities. For example, throughout the 19th, and especially in the late 20th century, humans increasingly sentimentalized animals and nature because of state formation (Elias 1994; Franklin 1999), urbanization (Jasper and Nelkin 1992; Thomas 1983), and postmodern culture (Franklin 1999). Prior to these events, humans rarely sentimentalized animals. Without laboring details here, the general argument is that the state, urbanization, and postmodernity caused humans to increasingly view some animals as distinct subjects.

I argue that how humans talk about distinct animal selves does not simply reflect animal subjectivities, but is refracted through culture. Larger symbolic structures affect how humans think and talk about animals, which animal interaction sociologists do not consider in *their analysis* of animal-human relationships. Human caretakers commonly talk of their pets as distinct subjects, but the culture of human-animal relations makes this sentiment thinkable and expressible. I am therefore unsurprised that pet caretakers talk about their animals as subjects, and I take their accounts with a grain of salt. If it is acceptable for caretakers to talk about their pets as subjects, I doubt this talk is evidence of distinct animal selves. Just because caretakers say something about their animals does not mean it is true—although it is true that they said it.

Even though the pet as a sentimental subject is the dominant cultural prism through which caretakers think of their pets, some caretakers do not think of their pets as subjects. “Pet” is not a neatly coherent cultural category. Humans frequently treat their pets as utilitarian objects, even though this violates the cultural framework of animals as subjects. Many humans mistreat their animals either through abuse or neglect, and others abandon and euthanize their pets when they no longer want them. Consequently, shelters euthanize millions of unwanted pets each year (HSUS 2009), some more humanely than others. Caretakers who give up their animals,

especially for convenience, unlikely see their animals as distinct selves with certain tastes but as a genderless “its.”

I emphasize the incoherency of pets as cultural categories to demonstrate that there is nothing essential about pets since humans treat them differently. Pets are polysemic and contradictory cultural categories; they are both sentimental subjects and utilitarian objects. For example, guide dog trainers may treat their dogs as behaviorist machines. Some pet owners may act towards their pets as “superficial subjects;” they might talk about their pets as subjects, but they may decide to give their pet to a shelter when caring for the pet becomes inconvenient. Other pet owners may act towards their pets as pure subjects, and could never imagine giving up their animals because they view their pets as their soul mates. These different views of pets are social and cultural artifacts that influence how humans interpret the inner lives of animals. While animals may shape how humans think of them, culture makes it possible and intelligible to think of animals in certain ways. Talk of distinct animal selves, therefore, reflects culture(s) of animal-human relations more so than the essential qualities of animals.

Overall, the animal interaction sociologists fail to examine the larger culture that influences how humans define and subsequently act towards animals. In my view, these sociologists carry and reflect the sentimental culture of animals, more so than they analyze and problematize this culture. They are taking part in a cultural debate, more than they scrutinize the meaning of animals or investigate those meanings empirically. If animals are cultural products, the preoccupation with animal selfhood obscures other fruitful questions. Alternative questions to “What is the inner life of an animal like?” are “Why do humans contrastingly view animals? Why are some people more likely to give animals selves than others? What does this say about a larger culture regarding animals?”

In summary, the animal interaction sociologists seldom question human accounts of animal selves but accept them for what they can tell us about animals. But if these accounts of animal selves are products of sentimentalization via culture, I would argue the accounts are attributions of human thought rather than an objective reality. We can imagine what an inner life of an animal is like, but we cannot know this. Stated otherwise, “Humans have false intuitions about the inner lives of animals but limitless imaginations of them” (Gopnik 2011: 52). While criterion 2, self-awareness, does not suffer from this epistemological pitfall, it does suffer from empirical handicaps.

Under criterion 2, I argued that a being is self-aware if it is an object to itself from the perspectives of others and/or through self-interaction. In contrast, Alger and Alger (2003) and Irvine (2004) have different criteria of self-awareness. Alger and Alger (2003) argue that the cats they studied were self-aware because they adapted to novel situations, they learned from each other and their own experiences, they made choices, they cooperated, and they displayed a complexity of behavior. Irvine (2004) claims that animals have selves, or become aware of their subjective “I,” because they possess agency, coherence, affectivity, and self-history. However, both Alger and Alger’s (2003) and Irvine’s (2004) accounts of animal selfhood are beleaguered with three empirical problems.

First, Alger and Alger and Irvine do not convincingly show *how* animals become conscious of themselves from the perspective of others, which is a fundamental quality of self-awareness. They stress particular characteristics of self-awareness while ignoring the process of self-consciousness. That is to say, they are working backwards; they focus on outcomes of selfhood such as agency, coherence, learning, complexity of behavior, etc. They stress outcomes over processes because the outcomes are more empirically inferable. There is nothing wrong

with this approach, but this is only part of the necessary evidence. These sociologists need to show, if possible, *how* animals are self-aware or how animals become objects to themselves. This implies not only demonstrating how animals have an “I” but also how they have a situated and generalized “me.”

Second, there is little evidence in this literature that animals self-interact, or act towards themselves as they act towards others. Do animals get upset with themselves (or others)? Feel proud of themselves (or others)? Hate themselves (or others)? If animals can act towards themselves as they act towards others, then this would be adequate evidence that animals are self-aware; they are treating themselves as objects. However, animals acting towards themselves may not be readily observable in most cases.

Third and finally, the lack of a common language between human and animal presents empirical problems for knowing the animal other. Unlike animals, humans have empirically demonstrable selves known through language. Someone might tell a friend, “I can’t believe I said that to John. He is probably going to think I am crazy.” This person’s self is articulated to others through a common language. This self, therefore, is easily verifiable. Furthermore, human selves are also confirmed through self-directed actions. Acting towards ourselves is an everyday occurrence, which we easily convey to others. For example, if I get mad at myself for giving a lousy lecture, I can relate this to a sympathetic colleague. The self, therefore, is readily knowable through language. While the self may not be contingent on language, it is easily recognized through language.⁸ This makes the sociological research of animal selfhood a precarious enterprise.

⁸ Perhaps this is why Koko’s self narrative might be the most persuasive evidence of animal selfhood presented herein.

Animal Selves, Animal Rights

Perhaps the most important consequence of selfhood is its moral implications. For example, *Animal Liberation* author, Peter Singer (1990: 20), reminiscent of John Locke, argued that beings that have self-awareness can “think ahead and have hopes and aspirations for the future.” According to Singer, one of the central aspirations of self-aware beings is a concern over what happens to them, especially that which may jeopardize their desire to live. That is, self-awareness is fundamental to possessing an interest in one’s life. If animals are self-aware, and therefore have an interest in their lives, then a moral question arises: can humans justify killing something that does not want to be killed? Some philosophers have debated this question, with the debate often revolving around the subjective characteristics of animals. In this section, I examine how philosophers and sociologists have mostly upheld but sometimes refuted animal rights based on animal self-awareness.

Peter Singer is perhaps the world’s most well-known animal rights philosopher, though curiously, he does not advocate that animals have rights partly because he argues that animals *do not* have self-consciousness. Instead, Singer maintains that animals are sentient, and therefore are capable of suffering. Singer argues, then, that though animals have an interest in not suffering, they do not have an interest in life because they are not aware of themselves. Humans, then, should not cause animals to suffer, but according to Singer, humans can own and kill animals if their suffering is minimized. For Singer, suffering is the primary problem (Francione 2000). Singer does not outright condemn animal use, but rather accepts it so long as it is humane and painless. Singer, while very important in the animal welfare and rights movements, actually denies animal rights and justifies animal use because animals lack self-consciousness.

In contrast to Singer's perspective, animal rights philosopher Tom Regan (2004) takes a more radical approach as he argues that animals have inherent value, meaning that they have value independent of the value they are attributed by others, because they are "subjects as a life." According to Regan, a being that is a subject of a life possesses mental sophistication, exhibiting certain subjective qualities, such as perception, memories, desires, intentions, and a sense of the future. Importantly, subjects of a life possess some form of self-awareness. Regan argues that animals have psychological identities, or notions of self, which can change over time, though as I have pointed out this varies depending on the species considered. Regardless, the foundation of Regan's animal rights perspective is thus based on the notion that animals have complex subjective states; this is what makes animals a subject of a life. The implications of Regan's perspective are more extreme than Singers. While Singer's utilitarian perspective justifies animal use in circumstances that do little harm to animals, Regan's animal right perspective maintains that humans cannot use animals at all because doing so would violate animals inherent worth. Regan argues that animal use is wrong because animals have rights.

Following in Singers and especially Regan's footsteps, animal sociologists have also invoked self-awareness to make moral claims about how humans should act toward animals. While Arluke and Sanders (1996) are troubled by how humans treat animals, they do not try to persuade the reader to adopt a specific moral perceptive. Instead, they partake in sociological analysis, as they describe how humans categorize animals based on worth, such as good animals, like pets and tools, from bad animals like vermin and demons. They also explain how humans can love and harm animals through various strategies and justifications. In contrast, the last chapters of the Alger's *Cat Culture* and Irvine's *If You Tame Me* take a value laden approach, sharing a common theme: persuading the reader that animals have moral worth. More

specifically, they claim that if animals have selves and culture, then humans have no justification to oppress them. Their work is not simply a sociological examination of animal selfhood, but as Jerolmack (2005) puts it, a thinly veiled form of animal rights. Indeed, as the Algers (2003: 196-197) confess, “Because we are animal activists as well as social scientists, the findings of our study have made us even more committed to the animal rights perspective.”

Both the Algers and Irvine take a Reganian perspective to animal rights, as they argue that animals are subjects of a life, since they possess culture and selves, and therefore have inherent value. The Algers argue that domestic animals deserve a right to moral consideration and greater protections from the state, as many of them are euthanized each year. They base this moral argument in their own evidence; echoing Regan, they argue that animals should be part of our moral community because they “enter into complex relationships, are able to see things from another’s point of view, learn from one another, adopt to novel circumstances, and indicate self-awareness and individuality...” (Alger and Alger 2003: 198). They then go on to generalize from their study about how all animals are oppressed, describing the poor conditions farm animals face, the troublesome practices of animal experimentation, and the consumerist outlook humans have toward pets. The Algers view cats and animals more generally as subjects of a life that have inherent value. Consequently, they urge sociologists to study animals from the “perspective of stratification and oppression” (Alger and Alger 2003: 210).

Leslie Irvine (2004) also takes a Reganian perspective on animal rights, as she argues that animals have an interest in their lives because they feel pain and are self-aware. Like the Algers, she argues for protections and educational programs for companion animals. She also makes wider generalizations about animals, as she explores the case for animal rights from an abolitionist perspective, which advocates the abolition of all animal use including food, clothes,

and research. Irvine (2004: 182), siding with the abolitionist view, even goes on to argue that pet keeping is immoral. She argues that:

...recognizing animal selfhood and its influence on human identity should lead us to acknowledge the value of animals' lives. In turn, we should realize that it is immoral to keep them for our pleasure, regardless of whether we call them companions or pets.

According to Irvine, animal selfhood gives animals inherent worth and gives humans "profound obligations" (2004: 184) to animals, and as such, humans must contemplate the morality of human-animal relations, including eating and pet keeping. Like Alger and Alger, she takes an animal rights approach to her research, carefully encouraging the reader to change their view of animals.

For the Algers and Irvine to argue that animals have rights because dogs and cats are self-aware is a bit of a stretch. This speaks to one of the central problems of the Reganism approach to animal rights: determining which animals are subjects of a life. As I and others (Warren 1987) have argued, subjecthood comes in degrees. Are insects, fish, or amphibians subjects of a life and therefore have inherent value? Some insects, after all, demonstrate complexity of behavior. Even Mead (1934) argued that ants have complex group life and social organization. Perhaps ants are subjects of a life because they have mental complexity, such as perceptions, desires, intentions, and even self-consciousness, that facilitates their social organization. However, as I have argued, it is unclear how humans can empirically demonstrate these qualities in most animals, especially insects. Even if it was true that ants possess these characteristics, they are unlikely to possess them to the same degree that humans do. Ant self-awareness is likely to be much different than human self-awareness. Overall, it is difficult to ascertain which animals have rights and which animals may not have rights using Regan's criteria of mental sophistication.

Regan, however, argues that in cases where we are unsure, we should assume animals are subjects of a life. Assuming that animals are subjects of a life, though, is different than evidence for such capacities in animals.

Since animal selfhood suffers from empirical and epistemological problems, claims of animal rights based on animal subjectivity are dubious. The animal selfhood premise of this argument is precarious, and thus social scientists and philosophers should not so readily accept its conclusion of animal rights. Animals cannot have rights based on subjective qualities that they may not possess. Rather than focus on subjectivity, there are other salient factors to consider in granting rights to others. For example, from a Kantian perspective, those who are rational should have rights because they can alter themselves through reason. Rationality is important because it provides opportunities to reason with others and to nonviolently resolve conflict. However, if rationality is the benchmark, then animals are likely excluded from any notion of rights. To avoid this drawback, another salient factor for animal rights is sentience, the capacity for sensation. Even if animals are not rational like humans, this does not mean that humans can be cruel to animals. Moral rights are complex. Animals may not inherently have them (though it is unclear if any being “inherently” has rights), but humans may *ascribe* rights to animals, especially those who are sentient. As Francione (2000) argues, sentient beings care what happens to them, and very likely value their lives. Sentient animals are logical candidates for moral rights because they prefer to be treated in specific ways, particularly in ways that do not harm them (Warren 1987). We thus do not have to assume that such animals have complex subjective states for them to have rights. Because animal self-awareness is complex and uncertain, it makes much more sense to use other factors, particularly sentience, as standards of animal rights.

Conclusions

Even though I have been critical of animal selfhood, I do believe that sociologists should at least consider it a possibility. Just because we are not entirely sure that something is true, does not mean we should assume it is false (Sanders 1999). Animal selves, in a limited Meadian sense, are potentially real even though in most cases they are unwitnessable and unverifiable phenomena. Nevertheless, sociologists interested in animal selves need to demonstrate how animals can become objects to themselves from the perspectives of others or through self-interaction.

The first step in this process, perhaps to the displeasure of sociologists, is to demonstrate the biological foundations of the self. Mead argued that the self was biosocial, by which he meant humans are biologically equipped for selfhood, but this biological ability is only manifested in social experience. Researchers interested in animal selves need to show what types of cognitive, sensory, and locomotive abilities are necessary for selfhood, and how humans and animals compare on these dimensions. Marc Bekoff (2006) argues that neural imaging is a promising approach because it can identify brain activities associated with self-consciousness. Bekoff suggests collecting data on self-conscious neural processes in humans and comparing these processes as they occur in animals engaged in self-directed behaviors, such as chimpanzees examining themselves in mirrors. If the neural processes between the selected humans and animals are similar, this might reveal objective standards of self-consciousness in humans and some animals, which ethologists could search for in other animals. Secondly, sociologists need to demonstrate how animals who seemingly are biologically equipped for selfhood act towards themselves. This is no easy task, but it is a necessary one. Until this is achieved, most animals, except for the language trained apes, do not have verifiable selves.

Even if animal interaction sociologists can successfully demonstrate how animals have selves, their research should also speak beyond animal-human interactions to larger sociological matters. For example, research on animal selfhood should produce further knowledge of the self. The significance of animal sociology is not only what it can tell sociologists about animals, but what the study of animals can tell sociologists about larger sociological issues and concepts. This will further legitimate animal studies in sociology, as it will contribute to the larger discipline a theoretical import (Arluke 2003). In addition, more research needs to be done on different types of animals. Generalizability is an important factor in the social sciences, and the rules of the game cannot be suspended just for animal sociologists. Therefore, sociologists have to be far more cautious than these scholars in claims about “animals” based upon research of dog and cat behaviors. While it is plausible that many mammals have selves, it is not clear if most birds, fish, or insects have such capabilities.

Given that research of animal selfhood suffers from empirical and epistemological problems, I would encourage sociologists of animal-human relations to research how animals function as symbolic resources. This research could explore how people use animals to make claims about their identity, status, morality, sophistication, distinctiveness, etc. This is promising research because it has the potential to address larger sociological issues. Both sociologists of culture and symbolic interactionists can make substantive contributions here. I suggest sociologists research taste publics, such as animal shows, in which animals represent status, leisure, and competition. Bourdieu’s (1984) work on distinction and capital seems salient in such environments. In fact, I have conducted research on groups of competitive equestrians who draw moral boundaries between themselves, yet ironically these boundaries are not very important to them. Sociologists could also research how humans use pets to construct families, such as

parents who utilize pets to teach their children morals and manners. Other sociologists could explore how people use animals to make claims about their self, such as vegans who claim a moral, spiritual self in an increasingly amoral world. Or, in line with symbolic interactionism, sociologists could compare how individuals define with how they act towards animals. For example, many humans believe that animals and nature are moral, pure, and good compared to amoral humans who engage in war, murder, and other questionable acts. In addition, as animal interaction sociologists have demonstrated, many people think of animals as active subjects, who are emotional, cognitive, and self-aware. But these same people might eat animals. This research could highlight the emotion work people use to make sense of their contrasting definitions and actions.

In closing, animal interaction sociologists still have a long way to go to show how animals act towards themselves as objects. Consequently, I propose sociologists of animal-human relations research animals as symbolic resources. Sociologists who take this approach can make more convincing empirical claims than sociologists who treat animals as symbolic actors because there are no attempts to know the animal other. In addition, sociologists who research animals as symbolic resources can produce conceptual findings that transcend animal-human relations, unlike sociologists who focus solely on the abilities of animals. Indeed, the promise of the sociology of animal-human relations is not simply what it can tell us about animals, but what our relationships with animals can tell us about social life.

CHAPTER 3

VEGANISM: ETHICS IN EVERYDAY LIFE ⁹

In 2014, Senator Cory Booker became a vegan. He explained during a recent interview with the Daily Beast that he does not want to harm animals, stating “being vegan for me is a cleaner way of not participating in practices that don’t align with my values.” While Booker emphasizes personal values, New York Post writer Eliyahu Federman in his article “Cory Booker’s Animal Rights Extremism” believes that Booker is trying to impose his “extreme animal rights” values on others through his legislative decisions and through his seemingly influential social media musings. However, Booker’s own explanation of why he is vegan is individualized. In accounting for his veganism, Booker stresses that his actions and values are his alone and avoids imposing his morals onto others. Another famous vegan, Moby, a musician, has also explained why he is vegan in a recent Rolling Stone article. There, he described his rich connection with pets growing up, which caused him to have an epiphany: if he loved his cat and would never harm him, how could he do that to another animal? Moby explained, “My reason for becoming a vegetarian was simple: I loved (and love) animals and I don’t want to be involved in anything that leads to or contributes to their suffering.” Two years after becoming vegetarian, Moby transitioned into veganism. Moby, however, does not argue that everyone should be vegan. He argues, “Just because I’m a vegan I’m not saying you should be a vegan. It would be ironic if I refused to force my will on animals but was all too happy forcing my will on humans.”

Cory Booker and Moby’s accounts of veganism are significant for two reasons. First, they both discuss veganism in individualized ways. Booker stresses that his decisions and values

⁹ This article was previously published. Ryan Turner. 2019. “Veganism: Ethics in Everyday Life.” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 7: 54-78.

are personal; Moby stresses that his likes and practices are based in his distinctive experiences. Second, Booker and Moby do not emphasize veganism as a general moral imperative. Rather, they seem to have either encountered or promoted the notion that veganism is an individual choice, supporting the ostensibly American belief that individuals have the freedom to live as they desire. Federman, who wrote about Booker in his New York Post piece, urged Booker not to force his veganism onto others. But there are no other suggestions that that was Booker's intent. Similarly, Moby explicitly states that he would not force his will onto others. Moby indicates that individuals should decide on their own if they wish to be vegan, demonstrating that he does not think of veganism as morally binding on others. Both issues—individualized discourse about veganism and a refusal to formulate veganism as a general moral imperative—emphasize individualism. Drawing on the tradition of modern individualism (Bellah et al, 1985), Booker and Moby individualize their morals rather than stress morals as collective obligations.

To learn more about how ethical vegans¹⁰ think about presenting veganism to others, I interviewed twenty-four vegans and conducted fieldwork at vegan gatherings. In my interviews and conversations, I found that vegans adopt two contrasting moral positions on veganism. The first position is “strict individualism.” When vegans take this position, they privately believe and publicly present veganism as an individual choice, not a general moral imperative that others ought to follow. While these vegans are troubled by how humans treat animals, they do not think others ought to be vegan. The second position is “strategic individualism.” When vegans take this position, they privately believe that veganism *is* a general moral imperative or collective moral obligation, meaning that they see veganism as a matter of collective right and wrong. They therefore believe that all individuals, with perhaps some exceptions (for example people from

¹⁰ I use “vegan” throughout the paper as a shorthand for “ethical vegan.”

non-industrialized countries) are morally obligated to veganism. They thus believe that killing animals for human consumption is wrong, at times comparing it to slavery and murder. However, when these vegans discuss veganism with others, they tend to talk about it in the same terms as Booker and Moby¹¹. They often explained to others why they were vegan in individualistic ways. They stressed the personal character of their decisions, values, and experiences and resisted making moral claims about how nonvegans ought to live their lives. As I will show, vegans use strategic individualism to avoid interpersonal conflict and to engage in effective activism. Indeed, many vegans I interviewed feel that their interactions with nonvegans can facilitate conflict as nonvegans may be disinclined to their position on animals. They therefore invoke individualism to manage the impressions of others, producing nonconfrontational and civil interactions.

In this paper, I use veganism to examine American individualism. Sociologists have long claimed that individualism is the first cultural language of Americans, and consequently Americans have trouble talking about community obligations (Bellah et al 1985). While I found this to be true of strict individualism, strategic individualism does not fit this claim. In fact, vegans who use strategic individualism reject individualism, specifically as a moral position on veganism. That is, their first moral language is of collective obligations to animals. While vegans sometimes publicly individualize veganism to avoid interpersonal conflict, they may not privately believe in it as doctrine of veganism. Rather than experiencing individualism as an internalized cultural schema, they strategically use individualism to define a situation. I thus argue that individualism is not simply a deep, taken for granted American value. Rather,

¹¹ While Booker and Moby publicly individualize veganism, it is unclear if they employ strategic individualism or strict individualism because their private beliefs about veganism are uncertain. For example, they may think of veganism as a public good but present it as an individual choice. To know if this is the case, I submit that the best way to understand their perspectives is through in-depth face-to-face interviewing.

individualism is also a strategic resource that individuals can use during presentations of moral self.

This paper has four main parts. First, I will review the literature in cultural sociology that addresses “American Individualism.” I will show what sociologists mean by the term “individualism” and how they use it. I submit that it is fruitful to think of individualism as a conviction and a resource. I will also briefly review literature on veganism and impression management. Second, I will explain how I collected and analyzed my evidence. Third, I will present my evidence categorized by two positions vegans can take: strict individualism and strategic individualism. Finally, in the discussion and conclusion, I address the substantive and methodological implications my research has for how sociologists think about individualism and social action.

American Individualism

Sociologists of culture have long argued that “liberal individualism”—the belief that each person should have the right to think and act in a way that is largely free from collective restrictions (Grabb et al 1999: 513)—is an important American value, dating to the American Revolution (Lipset 1996) or at least the abolition of slavery (Grabb et al 1999) and intensifying in modern America (Bellah et al 1985). Alexis de Tocqueville offered one of the most influential formulations of liberal individualism during his visit to the United States in the early 1830s. In *Democracy in America* ([1840] 1954), he argued that the equal and democratic conditions of the United States encouraged Americans to value individualism, which he describes as “...a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow creatures...” ([1840] 1954: 506). Because the US was democratic and equal, Americans believed they had the power to shape their own destiny, that individuals made

something of themselves without having to depend on others. Individualism seemingly trumped obligations to others. Consequently, Americans had the capacity to isolate themselves from community. Tocqueville worried that individualism, because of a lack of community obligations, could lead to despotism. In other words, if people did not get involved in public affairs, their independence could be in jeopardy. Yet Tocqueville saw that Americans could counter the pernicious effects of individualism through political and religious participation, forming civic associations, and reading newspapers, which made readers aware of common interests. Individualism could thus be restrained by community responsibility.

Since Tocqueville, many sociologists have claimed that liberal individualism is a prevalent American value today. Perhaps the most prominent work on modern individualism, influenced by Tocqueville, is Robert Bellah and others' (1985) classic *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, in which they argue that American's cultural "first language" is individualism. Bellah argues that Americans, especially middle class white Americans, believe in an autonomous, independent self; that Americans are their own persons free to make their own choices. Americans view liberal individualism as a moral right; they *should* be free to achieve certain goals, desires, happiness without others telling them how to do so. Bellah (1985: 142) explains, "Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious." Any violation of liberal individualism is a moral transgression against the dignity and sacredness of the individual. Thus, the central moral meaning of Americans' lives is to become their own persons on their own terms (Pugh 2015; Silva 2015).

To become an autonomous individual—one's own person—Americans break away from family, community, and inherited ideas (Bellah et al 1985). For example, Americans tend to

think that they must leave the family to become an independent person or an adult (Schalet 2011). Per Bellah, individuals indicate to themselves and others that they are their own persons through utilitarian and expressive individualism. The former indicates that individuals are free to maximize their interests, typically material needs. The person enacting utilitarian individualism is defined by his or her personal accomplishments and success (Hewitt 1989). Expressive individualism, on the other hand, refers to the expression of one's inner person, one's true nature, free of social conventions. The person enacting expressive individualism is defined by his or her "real self" that can overcome social constraints.

Bellah et al (1985) argue that Americans value community—a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate in discussions of the public good—less than the individual, a change from previous Americans who, according to Tocqueville, valued both. Consequently, communalistic ways of organizing life, such as Republicanism and Biblical traditions, are merely Americans' second cultural language. These traditions define the person not simply as an individual but as a member of a religious, social, or political community (Jensen 1994). However, because Americans view these traditions as part of their second language, they do not have a strong collective aspect to their sense of self. Americans do not seem to value a community in which spiritual and ethical life can prosper, nor are they involved in political affairs for the betterment of their communities. Rather, they resemble utilitarian or expressive individuals, preoccupied with their own needs and desires. Even when Americans are part of something that resembles community, they have a hard time speaking of their collective obligations to each other. Instead, they believe that individuals have the freedom rather than collective obligation to join communities (Bellah et al 1985). Americans thus speak of community through the language of individualism.

Bellah et al (1985) claim that Americans have become radically individualistic, causing them to detach themselves from community and political involvement, echoing Tocqueville's concern. Other sociologists have questioned the extent to which Americans are overly individualistic (see Cerulo 2008, Fischer 2008, Jensen 1994, Williams 1970), yet they still acknowledge that individualism is important to Americans. For example, Cerulo (2008), rather than argue that Americans are radically and preponderantly individualistic, highlights the temporality of individualism; in some contexts Americans are “me-directed” and in other contexts they are “other directed.” Similarly, Fischer (2008) argues that Americans value both individualism and group loyalty, a form of “voluntarism.” According to Fischer, Americans see groups as voluntary associations. Americans can freely join groups, with the expectation that they are loyal to the group, and they can freely leave these groups. Voluntarism celebrates group affiliation and individual choice.

Sociologists of culture thus argue that liberal individualism is a prominent American value even with some qualifications¹². These sociologists largely see individualism as a system of belief, an enduring and constraining part of American society that manifests within individuals as conviction. Americans are constrained by their cultural heritage, largely unaware of how individualism shapes their thoughts and actions. Bellah (1985), as I have suggested, is a leading

¹² Americans also value other forms of individualism, particularly economic individualism, which refers to the self-reliant individual who attains society's scarce material resources through individual merit, such as hard work ethic. Economic individualism is central to the American Dream narrative that anyone can get ahead if he or she tries hard enough (Hochschild 1995). Sociologists have also used both forms of individualism to explain sociological evidence, such as decline in social obligations to community (Bellah et al 1985), how Americans talk about morals (Jensen 1994), lack of political participation (Bellah et al 1985; Putnam 2001), how Americans think about adulthood and teenage sexuality (Schalet 2011), how Americans think about inequality and their self-worth (Bobo 1993; Lewis 1993; Lamont 2000; Silva 2015), and how Americans evaluate poverty and social spending programs (Gilens 1999; Rank 2003), among other explanations.

representative of this position, as he argues that liberal individualism constrains Americans to their detriment.

Following the approach of conceptualizing culture as a “toolkit” or repertoire (Swidler 1986; Lamont and Thevenot 2000; Weber 2005; Lizardo and Strand 2010), which emphasizes that culture is made up of common stocks of meaning that individuals can assemble in their social acts (Silber 2003), I contend that what is missing from this valuable literature on liberal individualism is an understanding of how individuals *use* individualism in their everyday lives to construct lines of action or solve problems¹³. Sociologists who study individualism have paid attention to how Americans are constrained by and embody individualism, but they have paid less attention to how individuals enact individualism in various social situations. In other words, sociologists have shown how individualism acts on individuals, more so than how individuals enact individualism. Moreover, when sociologists do link individualism to action, it is usually in abstract ways like “decline in community,” “social isolation,” or “lack of political support for poverty programs.” Sociologists do not have a good sense of how individuals, either through their informants’ accounts or through their own observations, pragmatically enact individualism in everyday social situations. While there is a debate about how individualistic Americans are, I think most sociologists can agree it is a cultural tool that Americans have at their disposal. With these considerations, what do individuals do with individualism? What do they accomplish by using individualism?

In summary, while sociologists often think of individualism as a system of belief internalized by individuals as conviction, sociologists can also conceptualize it as cultural

¹³ O’Brien (2015) is an exception, as he argues that individualism is not a deep American cultural value that directs Americans toward voluntarist conduct, but rather a strategy of action that Americans use to resolve the cultural dilemma of fulfilling external obligations within an individualistic context.

resource that is deployed in everyday life. In the pages below, I will demonstrate how vegans who employ strict individualism represent individualism as conviction, as they believe that veganism is an individual choice. In contrast, vegans who employ strategic individualism represent individualism as a resource, as they strategically use individualism as a cultural tool to manage the impressions of nonvegans. I thus argue that individualism is not simply a set of values or even a language. It is also a strategic resource that individuals use to achieve their goals.

Impression Management and Veganism

Vegans often find themselves in situations where they feel compelled to explain themselves to nonvegans (Greenebaum 2012; Twine 2014). In Erving Goffman's language, these are occasions of impression management. According to Goffman (1959), impression management occurs when interactants attempt to control how others view them through various interactional techniques, such as role display, expressions given, prop use, and more. In other words, when individuals present themselves with specific characteristics and capacities to others, they try to convince others in the parts they are playing. Moreover, Goffman argues that impression management has a moral character, as individuals who project a self to others expect others to honor that projection. The main goal of impression management is to define a situation so that co-interactants have a good sense of how to interact with each other, producing smooth interactions.

Impression management is not only a method of projecting a self-image, but it is also a way to uphold a “ceremonial order that is maintained by a system of etiquette” in which individuals satisfy minimal public deference (Goffman 1967: 114). For example, co-interactants may either enact “negative politeness” by not imposing themselves on others, or “positive

politeness” by respecting others’ self-projections (Brown and Levinson 1987). Moreover, Goffman argues that individuals are subject to “involvement obligations,” feeling that they must focus on and involve themselves in interactions in which they participate. To do otherwise—to withdraw from the ceremonial order—individuals risk attributions of being discourteous or impolite. Individuals tend to uphold this interactional order of civility through their own involvement in the interaction and ensuring that co-interactants sustain theirs.

While joint involvement in the ceremonial order of interaction produces civil interactions, alienation can occur. Impression management, then, requires individuals to perform what Goffman (1959: 208) calls “expressive responsibility” to avoid disrupting one’s projected image of oneself. Impression management thus requires planning on the part of individuals. However, self-presentations do not always go according to plan. One’s presentation may be spoiled because of unmeant gestures, or others may discredit one’s projected self, producing embarrassment and shame in individuals “over what he has or appears to have done to himself and the interaction” (Goffman 1956: 268). Thus, self-performances are delicate acts that can be jeopardized by interactional mishaps. Discredited individuals and their co-interactants, in response to embarrassment, may try to realign the interaction through “defensive” and “protective” practices (Goffman 1959: 13).

Vegans, given their moral positions on animals, may be discredited in the eyes of others, especially if they present veganism as a collective moral obligation (Greenebaum 2012). Indeed, vegans often experience various social tensions, including a lack of emotional support from family and friends (McDonald 2000; Cherry 2015); antagonistic interactions with nonvegans, such as nonvegans teasing vegans (Jabs et al 2000); and a lack of acceptance from nonvegans (Potts and White 2008). Nonvegans often view ethical vegans as judgmental “killjoys”, those

who disrupt the affective social order by destabilizing a negotiated sense of shared happiness (Twine 2014).

Given these unfavorable responses, vegans may try to manage the impressions of nonvegans to produce amicable interactions. To produce such interactions—to show others that one is “involved”—individuals feel obliged to convey their interests in ways that others will find “useable,” forming a bridge that individuals build among each other (Goffman 1967: 116). For example, in her study of vegans' impression management techniques, Greenebaum (2012) argues that vegans frequently participate in face-saving behaviors when interacting with nonvegans by reaffirming the positive social value of co-interactants. Specifically, they try not to be “killjoys” in the presence of nonvegans by avoiding confrontation, promoting vegan education, focusing on health benefits, and leading by example. In Goffman’s terms, they uphold the ceremonial order of interaction by maintaining the face of others.

Greenebaum's research is valuable, demonstrating the face-saving strategies vegans use to avoid conflict and involve others, a pattern also prominent in my evidence. However, she does not connect these strategies to larger cultural practices. For example, many of her interviewees, in my view, individualize veganism, to which many nonvegans may be receptive because individualism is a common American value. In contrast, I will demonstrate how the impression management tactics of vegans are rooted in American individualism. In addition, the public presentation of veganism pays theoretical dividends, particularly in sociological understandings of individualism, which Greenebaum does not emphasize. Importantly, I will show that vegans use individualism as a cultural tool to manage the impressions of others, theoretically demonstrating that individualism is not simply a matter of internal conviction, but as an expressive strategy of conflict avoidance.

Methods

While individuals become vegan for different reasons, such as personal health or environmental concerns, I intentionally sampled “ethical vegans,” those who become vegan primarily for the sake of the animals¹⁴ (Francione and Garner 2010). I interviewed twenty-four vegans from the Northeastern US to learn more about how they think about presenting veganism to nonvegans, starting with three initial interviews in the Spring of 2011, and the rest in 2013 and 2014. I interviewed seven men and seventeen women, all of whom were white except for one Latina. In addition, most of the interviewees were college-educated, which is typical of vegans in the United States (Cooney 2013). During the interviews, I asked participants about how they think about veganism, how they became vegan, how becoming vegan changed their relationships with others, how they talk about veganism with others, what they think of nonvegans and what nonvegans think of them, and how veganism impacts their day-to-day life. Most of the interviews lasted anywhere from one to two hours. All interviewees’ names are pseudonyms.

I also conducted eight extended observations. I went to a Northeastern vegetarian festival in 2014, attending a two-hour presentation about strategies for vegans to discuss veganism with family and friends. I also attended seven vegan potluck dinners/lunches starting in February to April 2011 and again in fall of 2012, some of which had themes like how to be jubilant activist, or how to evaluate the morality of local and “humane” farming. At the first potluck, I announced to the group that I was conducting research, though not all participants at later potlucks knew of my research because potluck participation was variable. However, I informed participants of my research if I interacted with them. After the first potluck, the organizer of the group also gave me permission to attend future gatherings.

¹⁴ This is one of the main reasons individuals adopt veganism (Cooney 2013), though my argument does not rest on representativeness.

Most of the potlucks had between ten and twenty attendants. Six of the potlucks took place at a local vegan restaurant usually on Sunday evenings, and one took place at a local church for lunch. The potlucks typically lasted around three hours, starting with informal socializing, then dinner, and then a film screening or a presentation by a guest speaker. Most of the speakers supplied handouts to the group, during which I wrote down fieldnote jottings summarizing previous and current interactions. I blended in with many of the participants during this time because many of them also took notes. During these potluck events and vegan inspired presentations, I observed vegans talk about veganism, and how they thought about conveying veganism and animal rights to hunters, farmers, friends, and family members. I also asked the participants how they became vegan, and how they talk about veganism with others.

While I would have liked to conduct observations of vegans interacting with nonvegans, this was not practical because vegans can avoid these interactions. Veganism is not a conspicuous social identity such as race or gender. Thus, vegans can easily “pass.” They do not always have to account to others—they do not have to tell others they are vegan—making it difficult to observe vegan-nonvegan interactions. While I do make claims about what vegans say to nonvegans based on vegans' accounts of these exchanges, I take their accounts of lived experiences seriously, as they are capable of “reflexive accountability,” meaning that orderliness of activities is observable and *reportable by members* (Berard 2005). Furthermore, many vegans are thoughtful about how they present their moral beliefs to nonvegans, which I discovered and explored during my interviews. Nevertheless, the lack of observational data is a limitation to this research. I address this issue in further detail in the discussion of the paper.

I made a point to inform my interviewees that I was also an ethical vegan. I believe this helped established rapport. In fact, many of my participants expressed that they felt comfortable

expressing themselves to me. However, while my positionality facilitated rapport, it is also possible that it could have influenced the integrity of my evidence. For example, it is possible that my interviewees, knowing that I am vegan, may have exaggerated their ethical veganism and understated their strategic individualism to give the impression that they are a consistent character so that I would see them in a good light, an example of what Goffman (1959: 34-35) refers to as “idealization.” However, I believe that because my interviewees felt that I understood their perspectives on interacting with nonvegans, they could comfortably express to me that they often censored their moral beliefs to define the situation.

I recruited interviewees through my fieldwork and through snowball sampling. Five of the initial interviewees were recruited during fieldwork. At the potlucks, I approached those who seemed comfortable around me and interested in my research, and asked them for an interview. No one declined. The other nineteen were recruited through snowball sampling, as I asked interviewees if they knew of other ethical vegans who might be interested in an interview.

Finally, I transcribed and coded the interviews and fieldnotes, paying attention to how vegans morally evaluate institutionalized animal use and how vegans convey their moral beliefs to nonvegans. I coded generally, focusing on themes like moral beliefs about veganism, interpersonal conflict, self-censorship, and various forms of presentation of self, such as conflict avoidance, veganism as moral imperative, and veganism as individual choice. Out of this, strict and strategic individualism emerged as common positions. In the following sections, I present and analyze my evidence by examining the different forms of individualism.

Veganism and Individualism

Strict Individualism

Strict and strategic individualism do not represent groups of vegans, but positions that vegans can take, although it is uncommon for vegans to adopt both positions since they are morally distinct. The vegans who identify with strict individualism are troubled by how humans treat animals in instrumental relationships, but, unlike those who identify with strategic individualism, they do not enforce collective moral obligations toward animals. They largely think that it is up to individuals to decide to stop consuming animal products. While they feel it is wrong for them to consume animal products, they do not think it is necessarily wrong for others to consume animal products.

Many vegans in my sample did not identify with strict individualism, yet those that did show how liberal individualism can influence how Americans think about morals. I asked James, who has been vegan since 2008 after learning about common practices in the dairy industry, if consuming animal products is wrong. James believes that using animals is not “an issue of right or wrong,” reasoning “I don't think a lot of people are informed of alternatives. Many are also unaware of the suffering involved.” In other words, nonvegans are not wrong to consume animal products because they do not know of vegan alternatives, nor the harm they cause. James does not hold nonvegans morally accountable because they know not what they do. James' individualized perspective on veganism is also conspicuous during his interactions with nonvegans. He said, “I think I usually say I've been vegetarian for a long time and the more I learn about the conditions animals are kept under, the more I realize it's the right decision.” Like Booker and Moby, James stresses his experiences and decisions when explaining his lifestyle to others.

Like James, Pilates instructor Julie also values liberal individualism to think about the moral status of animals. As a Pilates instructor, she believes in self-actualization and non-

judgment. She claimed that individuals should strive to be “the best they can be.” I asked her if people can be the best they can be and consume animal products. She replied, “That’s not for me to decide. I just know it’s not for me.” She further explained that if someone killed an animal she would “probably question where you are still at. But again, I can’t be my best operating from a place of judgment.” Unlike those who adopt strategic individualism, who I will describe below, Julie feels that she cannot say that consuming animal products is wrong. Julie is unusual in this sense, a clear contrast to the vegans who endorse veganism as a general moral imperative. She feels it is wrong for her to consume animal products, but she cannot make that judgment for someone else. Her morals are, indeed, radically individualistic.

Craig, who co-owns a bar and describes himself as someone invested in “counter-culture,” also thinks of veganism as an individual choice. He believes that he cannot judge nonvegans for consuming animal products because he and other vegans also make unethical choices. He pointed to the food, drinks, and material objects around us at the cafe where we conducted the interview, and said, “I don’t know where this stuff comes from.” He explained that the workers who made those goods worked in poor conditions for a pittance, something he finds unethical, yet he still supports it by purchasing these goods. Craig believes that because everyone makes unethical choices, we cannot really judge each other. He concludes, “I don’t like to come from a place of self-righteousness or damning other people.” Moreover, given that Craig is skeptical of rigid moral standards, he does not think of veganism as a collective obligation, stating that individuals can adopt veganism “if it’s the right choice for them.” He goes on to claim, “Do what you can. That’s kind of the best you can hope for. Even if you are still being a vegan you could do things that aren’t the right thing. And you look at those and try to change them when and where you can.” Craig’s moral outlook on veganism also influences how he talks

about it with nonvegans. He never tells others that “you need to change your diet.” He does not impose his morals onto others. In fact, others usually approach him, asking him if he is vegan for health or ethical reasons. He often replies it is a mixture of those things. He explained to me, “I don't think people want to get too deep into it generally, so I will give them a little bit of an answer. Generally speaking, it feels like small talk.”

James, Julie, and Craig all believe, more or less, that individuals are responsible for defining morals. They believe that individuals should try to be the best persons they can and do what is right for them. Craig argues, “I think you have a responsibility as a human, in my opinion, to try to do the right thing and be helpful and compassionate.” But as Bellah (1985) would have asked, how do we know what is right or compassionate? James, Julie, and Craig's reply is 'because it is right for us.' Veganism, then, is right for them but it may not be right for others. Perhaps they have not entirely thought out the implications of their positions, or they are unable to find a language for talking about collective obligation and so fall back on a language of individual choice.

Like the individuals Bellah and others interviewed in *Habits of the Heart*, these vegans see individualism as their first cultural language, a conviction that defines their moral outlook. Yet, as we will see in the next section, many of the vegans I interviewed—those who tend toward strategic individualism—did not think of individualism as their first language, providing an important contrast.

Strategic Individualism

Unlike most Americans who often feel that no one can really say that one value system is better than another (Bellah et al 1985), or that there is a right way to live one's life, when vegans employ strategic individualism they believe that veganism is the right way for humans to live. In

this sense, they do not experience individualism as a conviction, at least in regard to veganism. Instead, they use individualism as an interactional strategy to manage others' impressions about veganism. For example, they often explained to others that they are vegan because they do not support animal slaughter, or they supplied nonvegans with information about animal agriculture so that nonvegans can decide what to do with that information. While their accounts of veganism had a moral undertone, they largely stressed their personal decisions and beliefs or gave “objective” information rather than make normative claims about human's collective obligations to animals. Thus, when vegans employ strategic individualism, they view veganism as a general moral imperative, but wind up treating that imperative *as if* it were simply an individual decision.

Veganism as General Moral Imperative

Vegans who used strategic individualism often held firm moral standards, believing that causing harm to animals is wrong and therefore everyone—perhaps excluding indigenous people—ought to be vegan. For example, Mary, a dedicated animal rights activist, believes that humans should not own or use animals. Consequently, she is incredulous of the “animal movement's” emphasis on improving the treatment of animals. She explains further:

The bottom line is slavery. I don't believe in any animal being used for any reason what-so-ever other than being rescued or giving refuge. That's it. Horses, I don't care. I would never ride a horse again. To me, that's an indignity to the horse. And even vegans will say ‘really, you've never rode a horse before?’ They don't see that as hurting the horse. And it may not hurt the horse, but to me it is a matter of any use.

Mary compares animal use to slavery; she does not believe in using sentient beings, which includes both humans and animals, as means to human purposes. Consequently, the issue for her

is not treatment, but use. Humans, in her view, cannot justify using animals as resources independent of how humanely they are treated. Her approach to veganism is clearly a moral one. Consequently, Mary does not think of veganism as a personal choice or in her words a “food choice”; it obscures how veganism is a matter of, as Mary puts it, “social justice.”

Angela, a college student from a liberal arts college, also feels that causing harm to animals is a moral matter. During our interview, she told me a story about going to Malaysia, where she witnessed nearly lifeless chickens stuffed in small cages at a local market. In response, Angela started crying in the store. She explained to me that she was upset because she thought the vendors were doing something wrong. She said, “I know in my mind I should have released those chickens, I should have told them that they are wrong. Like they shouldn’t be doing that regardless of anything because they are hurting another being.” For Angela, harming animals is unethical. This is what motivates her to be vegan.

Sherry, who adopted veganism shortly after watching a film about animal experimentation, also views veganism as a general moral imperative. She argues that animals “have rights unto themselves,” that they are not here for humans. She also believes that humans do not need to eat animals to maintain healthy lives, and therefore they should stop consuming animal products. She explains, “There’s no need to have an animal be raised, tortured, and slaughtered.” She continued, “It makes no sense to me at all, we’re not living in caveman times anymore” suggesting that because plant foods are abundant in post-industrial societies, humans should not subject animals to slaughter. Furthermore, Sherry has a strong morally charged emotional reaction to the institution of eating animal products. She explains:

For me, when I watch people eating meat it’s that level of... I abhor it. Just like you saw a slaveholder here you would be like that person is bad. That is wrong. I

need to step in. You get this feeling, and that is my feeling when I see people eating meat and when I see them talking about killing meat and stuff like that. I kind of have this feeling of like, ‘oh my God, that is so sick. And you have no idea what you are doing, and it’s really awful and wrong and bad.’

Vegans also made claims about veganism as a general moral imperative at the vegan potlucks I attended. For example, during one potluck dinner, Paul, who has been vegan since 1983, gave a presentation about animal activism, during which he asked the twenty people in attendance their dreams for peace among humans and nonhumans. Some of the dreams were: animals are treated equally to humans; animals are not subject to experimentation; humans should respect all forms of life; all humans are vegan; end animal suffering at the hands of humans; all life is sacred; and to end racism, sexism, and speciesism. These visions are all normative claims about humans' collective obligations to animals. Clearly, many vegans at this event believed that veganism is a general moral imperative; they believed that humans should not harm animals. They should “go vegan.”

The Strategic, Individualized Presentation of Self

When vegans employ strategic individualism, they view veganism as a public moral good, but present veganism as a matter of choice during interaction with nonvegans, thereby individualizing their collective morals. I argue that these vegans individualize veganism to avoid conflict and to engage in effective activism. Many vegans, like Sherry, believe that discussions about veganism can become contentious. Sherry thinks that discussions about ethical veganism can cause nonvegans to feel internally conflicted, and they cope with defense mechanisms. She said, “I think they (nonvegans) become more entrenched, I think they become angrier, and all their defense structures go up.” The result is a combative interaction, something many vegans in

my sample wish to avoid. Furthermore, many of these vegans believe that discussions about ethics with nonvegans are unproductive because it will turn nonvegans away from veganism. For example, Paul told me during our interview that he believes vegans cannot make ethical claims about animals because “people don't want to hear that.” He thinks it is more fruitful to tell nonvegans about the plight of farm and research animals and they can “do whatever they want with that.” In other words, Paul, and others who use strategic individualism, believe that veganism is a general moral imperative yet strategically present it as individual choice to avoid interpersonal conflict and subsequently invite others to consider veganism. Their inconsistent thoughts and actions are not cognitive failures but self-consciously strategic, as they use individualism as a resource to achieve a goal.

I submit that one obstacle that vegans often confront in discussing veganism as a collective moral obligation is a presumed anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is the belief that humans have greater moral value than animals, usually because humans are rational and have complex subjective inner experiences, including selfhood. Consequently, the interests of humans are privileged over the interests of animals (Steiner 2005). In the United States and other societies, anthropocentrism is manifested through the property status of animals (Francione 2000). Americans are thus more likely to think of animals as objects than as sentient beings worthy of equal moral consideration. Vegans, however, especially those who employ strategic individualism, do not share this dominant view of animals. Questioning the order of things, however, is often met with resistance by the status quo (Jacobsson and Lindblom 2013). Anthropocentrism thus limits discourse about veganism as a general moral imperative, making it difficult for vegans to discuss the moral status of animals. Consequently, I contend that many vegans in my sample resort to using strategic individualism to address ethical veganism.

I found that since many vegans perceive resistance to ethical veganism, they use strategic individualism to devise ways to limit this resistance. In Goffman's (1967) sense, they avoid conflict to produce civil and polite interactions, honoring the value of others by sustaining a standard of involvement and considerateness, what Cahill (1987: 313) has referred to as the "interpersonal rituals of our religion of civility." Some vegans use strategic individualism to involve others in this ceremonial order of civility, hoping to avoid conflict. Such vegans—like other middle class Americans (Baumgartner 1991, Lamont 1992) and prominent vegetarians (Maurer 2002)—tend to value conflict avoidance in itself, yet others also value it as a method of effective activism. To avoid dissension, they enact three tactics, starting from the least to most common: 1) avoid talking about veganism, 2) present veganism as a personal choice or experience, and 3) provide information. Each of these tactics, explained below, emphasizes the individualization of the vegans' collectivist morals.

While many vegans feel proud to be vegan, some of them shied away from discussing it with others because they worried about conflict. For example, Kate, who aspires to be a medical doctor, is vegan for ethical reasons. While discussing animals raised for food, she said, "Everyone knows that killing animals in that way is not moral. How can you, how can a human say that they are more important than another form of life?" Yet, in many occasions, Kate herself does not say this during interactions with nonvegans. In fact, she avoids using the word vegan around others because it has "negative connotations." When I asked her about how she tells others she is vegan, she replied:

I try to be really nonchalant about it if someone asks or comes up because I don't want problems to start, you know what I mean? Because I've had issues in the past where people (pause). And there's this whole like negative connotation with

being a vegan. So like sometimes, I say, ‘I follow a plant based lifestyle diet...’

There’s a negative connotation being vegan. Like you’re that activist vegan that’s gonna convert you, and I’m not like that.

Kate, aware that others think of vegans as pushy, takes their perspective into account. She thus avoids using the word vegan when addressing others to prevent interpersonal conflict. She wants to involve others, upholding the interactional ceremonial order of civility. Indeed, Kate understands that “plant-based diet” is more likely to conjure notions of choice than collective moral obligations to animals (Maurer 2002), thereby facilitating a smooth interaction. A few vegans in my sample preferred to talk about health instead of commitments to animals. They thought that others would be more receptive to claims about personal health because it is viewed as a choice, something neither imposed on nor consequential for others. These vegans, then, talk about health to avoid conflict. Similarly, Rachel, a recent vegan who is a librarian, argued that she does not always tell others, especially those she does not know well, that she is vegan because “I don’t want them to feel uncomfortable. I don’t want them to feel like I’m pushing my ideas or ethics onto them.” Both Kate and Rachel think that nonvegans are morally obligated to veganism, yet they mute these collective commitments during interactions. They strategically avoid using the word “vegan” to avoid conflict; they do not want to appear as individuals who are morally demanding. In doing so, they implicitly present veganism as a choice that others are free to make, thereby strategically enacting liberal individualism.

While some vegans who practice strategic individualism participated in conflict avoidance by eschewing language of veganism, most of them did, at least occasionally, discuss veganism with nonvegans. However, their publicly presented beliefs about veganism contradicted their private moral worldview. Some vegans talked about their veganism as a choice

or personal experience rather than a collective obligation to animals. For example, Mary admitted to me that she has a hard time talking about veganism with non-vegans because it can make them uncomfortable and even antagonistic. She explained, “All these things (conversations) cause so much conflict that I use a lot of avoidance behavior.” Mary wants to discuss veganism with others as a general moral imperative, but feels that most nonvegans resist such discussions, which shapes how she talks about veganism. She usually explains to others that she is vegan by conveying, “I have looked into, I have researched what happens to animals and it just horrified me. I just couldn’t take it anymore. So I’ll say something like ‘I’ve learned what goes on and I just can’t contribute to it anymore.’” Mary stresses how her experiences shape her choices. She learned about animal agriculture and decided not to support it. While Mary hints at moralism—causing harm to animals is bad—she does not stress her morals as collective obligations. Instead, she individualizes her commitments as a strategy; she believes that this is a nonthreatening way to talk about veganism.

Similarly, Angela, who earlier wanted to tell merchants at a Malaysian market they were wrong for harming chickens, also individualizes veganism to manage others’ impressions. She offers either a long or short version, moving cautiously from a discussion of her own beliefs to claims about the objective conditions of an industry.

If they ask for the short version, I’m just like ‘oh well I care about animals, and I don’t believe in like the production of them.’ And if I tell the longer version, I’ll tell them about being vegetarian and like all the connections with animals that I’ve had. Then becoming vegan, specifically what happens in the industry and why I don’t agree with that.

Like Mary, Angela stresses her own choices. She talks about her likes and her beliefs. While her beliefs have a moral undertone, they are largely individualistic because she does not discuss morals as collective obligations but as personal decisions. She does not present veganism as the right thing to do. For Angela, this is purposeful action. She talks about herself as a strategy to produce nonthreatening interactions. She explained that though she feels very strongly about veganism, she realizes that her message can offend people so she tries “to find that line between getting your information across and like saying what you have to say, but also not overstepping and attacking them and that.” In sociological terms, Angela wants to uphold the negative face of others, producing a “politeness of non-imposition” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). Her strategy to not appear as a confrontational individual is to talk about herself, to reduce collective obligations to individual choice. She confided, “I’m definitely a liberationist at heart, but I don’t usually tell people,” meaning that she is hesitant to express to others that she believes that humans should not own and control animals.

Other vegans also present veganism to others as a choice. Sherry, who thinks of veganism as a general moral imperative as demonstrated above, tells others “Oh, I’m vegan so I don’t eat that. Or I’m vegan so I won’t do that. Something like that.” She claimed that it can be difficult to talk about veganism with others, stating “I don’t like conflict, and I don’t like making other people feel bad and then off of that, when people feel bad, some will awaken themselves and some won’t.” By talking about herself, by strategically deploying individualism during her interactions with others about veganism, Sherry manages the interaction so that it does not become unpleasant. Individualism is not something she values as moral viewpoint, but something she uses to achieve the goal of conflict avoidance. Connie, a college lecturer, agrees with Sherry’s approach. She believes that vegans are better off talking about veganism as a

choice or experience than a general moral imperative because nonvegans dislike when vegans impose their ethics onto them “by sticking their noses in other people's business.”

Lastly, during one of my observations of a vegan potluck dinner, a soft-spoken man named Gene asked Paul, a vegan who was giving a presentation about animal rights, how to tell hunters that their actions are immoral. Paul suggested that Gene tell the hunters that “hunting might be okay for you, but it is not okay for me.” Moreover, Paul instructed Gene to use I statements, like “I don’t like to kill animals, or I chose not to kill animals.” Paul’s answer does not actually help Gene talk about morals with hunters. Instead, Paul’s answer indicates that Gene should avoid engaging in discussions about morals with hunters by resorting to individualism. As shown above, Paul thinks of this as a strategy, as more nonvegans will be open to this type of discourse. Yet, Paul's approach is noteworthy because earlier in the presentation he talked about veganism and animal rights as general moral imperatives, claiming that humans do not have the right to “murder and exploit” animals.

The last way that vegans who use strategic individualism avoid conflict is through description rather than prescription, meaning they think it is better to “give people information” than “be pushy.” Many of them gave information about the problems with modern animal agriculture, such as explaining how the dairy industry supports the veal industry, or how male baby chicks are ground up alive because they cannot lay eggs, or how animals in factory farms are in confined areas for their whole lives. Rachel, while explaining to me how she tells others about the dairy industry, said “if they ask, I want to give them the truth, because I didn't know the truth for a long time. And they can take the information and do what they will.” By providing information about the industry, Rachel tries to give others the opportunity to reflect on their choices. She uses individualism strategically; she believes that giving others information will

produce amicable interactions. She expressed, “I don't ever want to make other people feel badly... I do try to sort of steer the conversation so I'm giving the information.”

During my fieldwork at a vegan/vegetarian festival in the Northeast, I attended a question and answer session that dealt specifically with strategies for talking to family and friends. The speaker of the event and some audience members thought of giving information as an effective form of impression management. The speaker told the audience that “we should be respecting animals and not unnecessarily killing and torturing them,” indicating that humans have a collective moral obligation toward animals. Yet, he is also aware that many nonvegans are unreceptive to such claims because “they feel shamed. They feel some sense of guilt, or they may take it personally; you're kind of telling them they are a bad person and that's not consistent with how they view themselves.” Many members of the audience, then, wondered how to talk with family and friends in a constructive way about veganism as general moral imperative. For example, one participant named Melinda said, “There is still this violence being done to animals and we have to kind of be okay with that going on... and you just want to shake people but you can't 'cause that's not what's effective. So how do you kind of integrate that to be okay with what you know is not okay?” In response to this question, he said “all you can really do is give information and try to hope that they will accept that.”

In general, the speaker frequently emphasized the idea of “giving information” about the welfare of farm or research animals to manage the impressions of others. For example, he said “Sometimes it can be helpful to give information and have them kind of read it on their own at their own pace, and then you can come back and talk about it afterwards.” While he and some members of the audience see veganism as a general moral imperative, he thinks it is best that vegans individualize their collective commitments to avoid unpleasant interactions.

Other vegans also think that giving nonvegans information is an effective way to avoid conflict, yet they also believe that this method is an effective form of activism. For example, Mary said:

They (nonvegans) might be willing to do it on their own. If they are not pushed, you know this whole thing is like a strategy. To me it is a fear of conflict but it is also a strategy not to push. Plant and seed and they'll go to whatever extent and wrestle with their conscious. And if they see you again, maybe they'll be another question. Maybe there won't be. It's like a... there's a certain amount of gentleness that can be very effective.

Mary does not only value conflict avoidance in a Goffmanian sense of defining the situation; she also values conflict avoidance as a method of recruiting nonvegans to veganism. Similarly, Bryan, who works in real estate, believes that giving nonvegans information about institutionalized animal use is an effective recruitment strategy. He argued, "I would much rather educate than make a moral claim," explaining that "Everybody has done things in their life that they probably shouldn't do, and a lifetime of eating things that they shouldn't be eating; it could be hard to reconcile if it's being presented in a moralistic fashion." Bryan is strategic about how he talks about veganism. While he thinks it is wrong for humans to consume animal products, he also thinks nonvegans are unopen to such a position. He therefore takes a milder approach by supplying information about institutionalized animal use. Indeed, he believes that individuals are more likely to adopt veganism if "people find it on their own" rather than being "converted."

Vegans who employ strategic individualism think that presenting veganism as a choice and providing information are effective tactics because each limits the imposition of morality onto others, allowing nonvegans to feel unencumbered and *decide on their own* (rather than

morality dictating) if they wish to be vegan or eat fewer animal products. Both approaches are centered around conflict avoidance and a larger code of ceremonial conduct in which individuals participate in the protective positioning toward maintaining the face of others producing “the communion of reciprocally sustained involvement” (Goffman 1967: 116-117), characteristic of contemporary civil society (Cahill 1987). Vegans who take this approach enact negative and positive politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987), not wanting others to feel threatened, alienated, or angered by their moral positions. Indeed, they do not want to give others the impression of constraint but the empowerment of choice. Consequently, they strategically used individualism to honor and involve others, thereby limiting conflict and engaging nonvegans.

In summary, while the stereotype of the “pushy” or “outspoken” vegan is common (Cole and Morgan 2011), very few of the vegans in my sample fit this stereotype; they believed that they should not be “pushy” or “forceful” with others. I have come to understand that this means that they believe they should *not evoke collective morals* when explaining veganism to others; they should not tell others how to live based on a moral principle. They largely believe that presenting veganism as a general moral imperative—something they privately endorse—will deter individuals from considering veganism. Consequently, they tend to talk about their choices and experiences when explaining why they are vegan to nonvegans, and gently present nonvegans with information about animal agriculture for nonvegans to mull over. Individualism, then, is not a value or language with which they identify; it is a cultural tool that they use to achieve the goals of conflict avoidance and effective activism.

Discussion

I have made two central points in this paper. First, this research demonstrates that individualism manifests in two different ways: strict individualism and strategic individualism.

Strict individualism refers to individualism as a commitment and philosophy for and in itself, experienced by individuals as conviction. Strategic individualism refers to individualism as a cultural resource, a second order commitment, deployed strategically to manage the impressions of others. Second, I have argued that the concept of strategic individualism furthers sociological understandings of individualism. While strict individualism is a familiar sociological representation of Americans as a deeply individualized people, strategic individualism is important because it counters that representation. It demonstrates that individualism is also a strategic resource that individuals can use to achieve their goals. Individuals, then, do not always experience individualism as a conviction central to their sense of self. Instead, they can construct a façade of individualism, deploying it as an interactional strategy.

Strategic individualism as a concept functions both as a critique and extension of Bellah et al's (1985) *Habits of the Heart*. It is a critique in that I have argued individualism is a strategic resource used to define a situation, demonstrating that it does not always operate as a cultural force that individuals experience as conviction as Bellah argued. However, while I have contrasted Bellah's conceptualization of individualism with mine, these two perspectives are not incompatible. Rather, my conceptualization, while a critique, is also necessarily an extension of Bellah's work. Strategic individualism works as a form of discourse because individualism is a larger system of belief or language, as Bellah convincingly demonstrated. That is, strategic individualism has cultural resonance because of America's individualistic value patterns. Thus, these perspectives, while distinct, are not oppositional but supplementary.

Conceptualizing individualism as a strategy rather than a conviction applies to other areas of social life. For example, strategic individualism is applicable to politics. Nina Eliasoph (1998) demonstrated how some political activists used individualistic language to discuss public issues.

In the backstage, Eliasoph often heard activists talk about public issues as matters of structural injustice. Yet when engaging with the public, some activists relied on individualistic language by emphasizing concern for their and their children's livelihoods. Like some of the vegans I interviewed, they focused on themselves rather than the moral principles they were advocating. While Eliasoph (1998: 184 and 250) is unsure and even incredulous if these activists are using individualistic language strategically to influence the media and the public, she does concede that a few activists may use individualistic language to get attention. Thus, even though some activists thought of public problems as matters of collective obligations, they strategically framed such problems as matters of individual self-interest to reach the hearts and minds of the public. Strategic individualism is also applicable to religion. Individuals may think of religion as a larger collective commitment, but might individualize their beliefs during interactions with those who think of religion as a choice to avoid interpersonal conflict. As a strategy, they may claim that their religion is their personal belief and that others are entitled to their own beliefs as well. In general, strategic individualism is most easily applicable to situations in which social actors wish to avoid or limit moral dispute, whether these situations are political, religious, etc.

This research also links closely to theories of "moral minimalism" that are associated with John Stuart Mill's principle that individuals can live as they desire so long as they do not mistreat others. It is a basic consequentialist morality in which individuals deem actions moral in so far as the actions do not cause others harm. In *On Liberty* (2002), Mill formulated this minimalist morality in regard to the relationship between the individual and the state. Arguably, however, moral minimalism is a prominent part of American moral life more generally (Callahan 1981), solidified by American's beliefs in liberal individualism, tolerance, and freedom, all of which are based on the belief that individuals are moral to the extent they do not cause harm.

To the degree that moral minimalism encourages individuals to live as they wish without meddling others, a common consequence of moral minimalism is conflict avoidance. For example, moral minimalism may be a central part of suburban life in the US, as suburbanites frequently avoid confrontational responses to interpersonal neighborhood grievances given the weak social connections among neighborhood residents (Baumgartner 1991). Furthermore, elementary school personnel teach their students to use I-statements so they can share their feelings in ways that “does not make someone defensive” (Empowering Education 2015: 3). As I have demonstrated, vegans also practice moral minimalism, though strategically, through conflict avoidance. They do not want to “harm” or offend nonvegans by threatening their moral sensibilities. They thereby engage in moral minimalism using individualistic discourse to produce civil, nonconfrontational interactions.

This research also contributes to sociological understandings of conflict avoidance. Research on conflict management has demonstrated that social context, particularly the strength of social ties, influences how individuals manage conflict (Baumgartner 1991; Cooney 1998; Morrill 1991; Tucker 1993). Research also shows the variety of ways that individuals manage conflict—including vengeance, discipline, avoidance, negotiation, settlement, and toleration—and the conditions under which each appears (Black 1993). It furthermore shows how interaction shapes conflict management. For example, Black (1993: 79) defines conflict avoidance as the “handling of a grievance by the curtailment of interaction”, such as segregation or decreased interaction. While individuals frequently avoid conflict by avoiding interactions or remaining silent during interactions (Black 1993), interactionists have frequently demonstrated that individuals can also avoid conflict using interactional strategies, such as impression management techniques (Goffman 1959) or aligning actions (Stokes and Hewitt 1976), among others. Conflict

avoidance, then, involves not only the curtailment of aggrieved interactions. It also involves the use of interaction itself, particularly forms of discourse that limit disagreement.

While agents can use interactional techniques to limit conflict, how they manage conflict depends on the cultural repertoires available to them (Silber 2003). Given that individualism is a common stock of meaning in the US, I submit that strategic individualism is a resource that individuals can use to limit conflict while still engaging others through a veil of civility. For example, vegans may use strategic individualism to come across as individuals who do not bear on others to avoid unpleasant interactions and to establish rapport with nonvegans. Strategic individualism, then, is a central way that vegans attempt to avoid conflict while still trying to involve others, especially for vegans who use strategic individualism as activism. Rather than evade others, they use strategic individualism to include them. Furthermore, I submit that strategic individualism is a prominent way that individuals preemptively avoid conflict, especially in cases of potential moral dispute regarding the greater good. Consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) argument that interactants produce politeness through culturally specific linguistic means, strategic individualism is a discursive politeness strategy that Americans will likely utilize to limit conflict over incongruent moral worldviews.

Lastly, I believe this research has implications for the debate in cultural sociology about using interviews to study social action. Jerolmack and Khan (2014) and Vaisey (2009) argue that interviews are not a good method for understanding conduct because what people say is a poor predictor of what people do. Jerolmack and Khan (2014), reiterating what Herbert Blumer (1955) wrote over sixty years ago, argue that sociologists cannot assume that subjects' attitudes expressed during interviews are also expressed during interactions. While attitudes are one possible line of conduct, individuals can fail to express them during interaction because

“meaning and action are collectively negotiated and context-dependent” (Jerolmack and Khan 2014: 178). If what people do is subject to the situations they encounter (Blumer 1969), then, according to Jerolmack and Khan, sociologists must observe situational conduct.

While Jerolmack and Khan make an important point—that if sociologists want to understand social action, they must attend to the social context in which that action takes place—I think all is not lost in using interviews to make sense of social action. Sometimes we are interested in disjunctions between what people say and what they do. Sometimes, though, we are interested in how people make sense of and even justify apparent differences between what they say and what they do (Mills 1940; Scott and Lyman 1968). Yet other times, we are interested in how people reconcile differences between what they say in different situations. That is what I have done here by examining vegans' private morals and how they think about and go about presenting their morals to nonvegans. Sociologists can use interviews to learn about the attitudes people hold, and how individuals think about presenting these attitudes to others. Because individuals can become objects to themselves (Mead 1934), interviewers can ask interviewees about the social objects they note in their environment to determine which aspects of the situation are consequential to their conduct (Thomas 1928; Lamont and Swidler 2014). For example, I discovered through in-depth interviewing that many vegans note that nonvegans are unreceptive to ethical veganism. In response to their self-indications, vegans strategically deploy individualism to avoid conflict and potentially recruit nonvegans. None of this would have been visible through observations alone. Thus, sociologists can use interviews to see how individuals define their environments and how those definitions direct their conduct.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this article, Moby told us that he does not think that others ought to be vegan because he does not want to force his will on others. Yet, he has also said, “Basically we should stop doing those things that are destructive to the environment, other creatures, and ourselves and figure out new ways of existing” (Fisher-McGarry and Robbins 2006: 64) While he is not explicitly addressing veganism, he is making claims about humans' collective obligations to animals. A vegan, then, will not always talk about veganism the same way to others. This is especially true of vegans who use strategic individualism. In some situations, particularly with individuals who are also ethical vegans or at least open to ethical veganism, they may stress veganism as a general moral imperative. Thus, strategic individualism is not static nor is it anything approaching a “master status”; it is a situational response that varies depending on the definition of the situation. Yet, I suspect that many vegans will employ strategic individualism in many interpersonal situations because individualism and anthropocentrism are common stocks of meaning.¹⁵ Even large animal welfare and rights organizations urge vegans to avoid absolutistic moral messages as it might perturb nonvegans (Maurer 2002).

While some vegans use strategic individualism to facilitate conflict management, such individualistic language may have unintended consequences. These vegans do not depict veganism as a public moral good or general imperative, but as an individual practice (Maurer 2002). This individualized tactic—this idea of live and let live—does not allow vegans to make the case that they have made the right choice and that others should follow. Under this logic,

¹⁵ The exception may be “abolitionist” vegans who view veganism as a general moral imperative, and that vegan activism must include this message (Francione 2000). None of the vegans I interviewed identified with this approach, but I explore this group in the next chapter.

vegans reaffirm the individualistic notion that each self defines its own moral universe. People decide as individuals what is good or bad, so the self and its feelings become their moral guide (Bellah et al 1985). Socially constructed or even objective standards of what is moral are left out of the conversation. Ironically, in avoiding conflict, in not explaining veganism as a general moral imperative, vegans publicly uphold the dominant view of animals: animals as objects. Their unwitting message to nonvegans may be that humans can choose to exploit animals, indicating that animals do not have objective or inherent moral value. Thus, while individualism helps vegans diplomatically discuss veganism, their use of it may also undermine the moral imperative they privately endorse.

CHAPTER 4

LEADING THE MIND TO WATER: THE MORAL STRATEGIES OF ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

In *Politics as a Vocation*, Max Weber (1946: 109) asks, “What kind of man is to be allowed to put his hand on the wheel of history?” In answering this question, he juxtaposes two ethical worldviews that politicians (or individuals in general) might exercise. He argues that ethical conduct is oriented toward either an “ethic of ultimate ends/conviction” or an “ethic of responsibility.” In the former, individuals are driven by the purity of their principles and promote their grand, idealized version of the world (Hammond 2009). They are dedicated to ultimate, non-negotiable values, concerned about doing what is right independent of the consequences. If undesirable consequences emerge from one’s “action of good intent,” (Weber 1946: 121), one believes that one is not culpable, while “the world, the stupidity of men, or God’s will who made them thus, is responsible for the evil” (Weber 1946: 121). Those who practice an ethic of conviction are largely unconcerned with the outcomes of their actions, but instead feel a responsibility toward the integrity of their value orientation. This is strikingly similar to Weber’s (1978) conceptualization of value-rational social action (O’Donovan 2011), which is action on the basis of a conscious belief of a value for its own sake. Those who practice an ethic of ultimate ends consciously believe in the importance of a particular value, independent of its consequences. Values act as normative forces, directing actors to feel compelled to act in specific ways. Such individuals ask “what are the demands of my values? And how can I act consistently with them?” (Starr 1999: 419). As Weber describes it, the ethic of ultimate ends evokes the phrase, “Here I stand; I can do no other” (1946: 128).

On the other hand, those who practice an ethic of responsibility are driven less by purity of principles themselves but more by a concern about the consequences of their ethical conduct,

privileging prudence over the purity of their own actions (Hammond 2009). Weber underscores two aspects of this ethic. First, an ethic of responsibility involves a calculation of how specific actions may lead to specific consequences, pursuing the “best chances for the best consequences” while minimizing poor outcomes (O’Donovan 2011: 105). Such individuals take into account how means lead to specific ends, acting strategically, thinking of the most efficient way of achieving political or ethical goals. In addition, those who act “responsibly” may also believe in the inevitability of value plurality and conflict between individuals (Starr 1999), and use such definitions to inform their conduct. Second, an ethic of responsibility involves a feeling of accountability for the foreseeable effects of one’s actions, holding oneself answerable for one’s decisions. Taken together, individuals practice an ethic of responsibility when, first, they ponder how their convictions, ideas, and decisions might affect the lives of citizens, and second, hold themselves accountable to individuals or institutions for the results of their actions.

Overall, an ethic of responsibility is an ethic of proportion and compromise; a responsible person does not act on convictions if such action may result in undesirable consequences (Davis 1999). It is also an ethic of accountability; a responsible person is answerable to their actions. While Weber argues that such ethical conduct “endangers the salvation of the soul” (1946: 126) in that individuals may not truly express their beliefs, a concern with consequences may result in the greater credibility of their claims. Again, this ethical conduct strikingly resembles Weber’s (1978) instrumental-rational action (Weber 1978)¹⁶, which is characterized by a “calculation of consequences” (Starr 1999: 410) in which individuals weigh means, ends, and

¹⁶ Some sociologists question associating value-rational action with an ethic of conviction, and instrumental-rational action with an ethic of responsibility. For example, individuals can pursue instrumental-rational action, yet act irresponsibly if they do not take ownership for the results of their actions (O’Donovan 2011). O’Donovan argues that responsibility is not simply a concern for the consequences of one’s actions, but a feeling of being accountable for one’s actions. A politician, for example, can feel concerned about how her decisions may impact the public, but she may not take responsibility for them especially if others disapprove of them.

consequences. This type of social action is shaped by larger expectations exerted on one's conduct, which are used to guide the means of one's rationally pursued ends (Weber 1978). In short, while an ethic of ultimate ends is centered on value demands, an ethic of responsibility is centered on effectiveness of achieving goals. Even shorter, the two ethics contrast principle versus strategy.

While Weber's distinction is often invoked, it has rarely been studied as an empirical proposition. I thus empirically examined Weber's distinction by interviewing and observing two prominent animal rights activist groups, welfarists and abolitionists. I found that each practice one of Weber's forms of ethical conduct. The welfarists, who want to ameliorate the worst practices in animal agriculture, practice an ethic of responsibility. They feel responsible for the consequences of their activism. For example, they take into account different framings of animal rights, the value orientations of non-activists, and the overall most effective means to their ends. More specifically, they worry that if their moral claims are too strong, targets may feel alienated and will thus continue to use animals, an unwelcome consequence. They typically emphasize individualistic discourse, presenting veganism or anything less as choices individuals make based on their own moral intuitions and principles. In short, they believe that the most efficient way of helping individuals adopt animal rights ideologies is to come across as unthreatening and undemanding in discourse and behavior. In addition, they also hold themselves accountable for their activism, in that they provide a rationale for their course of action, arguing that their approach has helped individuals become vegan. On the other hand, the abolitionists, who wish to abolish animal use altogether and think of any use as morally wrong, practice an ethic of conviction or ultimate ends. Unlike the welfarists, they believe that they should fully express their ethical perspectives, embodying Weber's noted description of this

conduct, “Here I stand; I can do no other.” In other words, they unwaveringly express their moral principles, advocating for the abolition of animal use. They do not censor their beliefs to appease others, but instead encourage others to think deeply about their moral commitments to animals. They thus emphasize animal rights as a collective obligation enforced by larger moral meanings of justice and fairness.

While each animal rights group largely fits into each of Weber’s ethical conduct, I also found that each group complicates Weber’s distinction. Weber’s distinction is important, but like most ideal types, it is more intricate in practice. Based on interviews and observations of the welfarists and abolitionists, I argue that the central properties of each ethic are not as distinct as Weber argues. In other words, adopting an ethic of responsibility does not mean abandoning an ethic of ultimate ends and nor does adopting an ethic of ultimate ends mean abandoning an ethic of responsibility. The welfarists show that an ethic of responsibility, like an ethic of ultimate ends, also involves moral convictions. For example, rather than feeling a conviction about a specific value orientation, I found that welfarists are morally committed to strategy itself. While many welfarists believe that harming animals is wrong, they believe that the public will reject such a message. In response, the welfarists opt for less morally charged language in the name of effective activism, sometimes viewing their strategic commitments as non-negotiable. For the welfarists, then, strategy is a form of moral commitment. Moreover, the ethic of ultimate ends, like an ethic of responsibility, also involves strategy. Abolitionist vegan activists, for instance, certainly believe in the integrity of their value orientation, yet they also believe that advocating for their moral positions will yield positive outcomes, such as more individuals converting to veganism. While Weber argued that individuals who adopt an ethic of ultimate ends are unconcerned with the consequences of their ethical conduct, for the

abolitionist, this does not manifest in practice as they view morality not only as an orientation but as a strategy. In short, Weber's distinction is more complicated in practice; an ethic of responsibility includes commitment, and an ethic of ultimate ends includes strategy.

Social Movements and Strategic Dilemmas

The animal rights movement faces a strategic dilemma regarding the best way to encourage the public to adopt veganism or reduce animal product consumption. As I will demonstrate in more detail, this predicament revolves around the presentation of ethics as either responsibility or ultimate ends. More generally, strategic dilemmas are characteristic features of social movements, as they face choices and constraints such as resource mobilization—both material (McCarthy and Zald 1977) and symbolic (Zurcher and Snow 1981)—identity mobilization, framing, among others. In this section, I mostly focus on problems of culture that social movement may encounter, particularly framing and identity. Activists often face macro cultural pressures to adopt tactics that are legitimate in the eyes of generalized others. In response, activists develop their own micro or idioculture (Fine 1979), more or less characterized by “bundles of narratives” (Fine 2002), which forge bonds between members thus creating and sustaining a collective identity, strengthen commitment to movement goals, and mobilize framing processes.

One central dilemma activists encounter involves strategic discourse. Social movements often contemplate how to frame their message in ways that persuade non-movement members to join the movement or adopt the ideology of the movement. This can be a formidable task for movements, as they are characterized by beliefs and attitudes counter to the dominant groups (Taylor and Whittier 1995). In resolving this tension, activists often rely on “framing”, which refers to how social movement actors present their ideas and demands in ways that might

resonate with the public, producing linkages between the “schemata of interpretation” of activists and the public (Snow et al 1986: 464). Snow’s framing perspective is often credited for bringing ideas back into social movements (Oliver and Johnston 2000), including elements of culture. According to Fine (1995), activists often rely on cultural displays in their framing techniques to recruit or transform others from outsiders to insiders. Though activists may hold attitudes at odds with the larger public, they usually craft their messages in ways intended to resonate with the larger public, usually by monitoring public discourse, specifically the media (Gamson 1995b and 1998). Frames that resonate with the public include both cultural logics and personal experiences with which non-movement members may identify (Snow and Benford 1992; Gamson 1995b).

Movement members invest in crafting a “collective action frame,” which includes meanings and beliefs that help legitimate a social movement (Snow and Benford 1992). These frames offer ways to interpret problems and imply a call to action. In general, the different types of collective action frames include injustice, agency, and identity (Gamson 1992). The justice frame refers to spreading moral outrage over a perceived inequity. The agency frame stresses collective action as a means to combat a larger social problem. Lastly, the identity frame refers to the process of groups rallying around their identities to demand rights and group justice. Movement members may have disputes over the best collective action frame, as we will see below with the animal rights movement.

Identity construction is also a problem for social movement members since it is important for the perpetuation of a movement (Fine 1995). This is especially pertinent to identity movements. Movement members primarily establish their collective identities through narratives. Roughly, movement members often share similar experiences, which evoke member

narratives about these experiences. Such storytelling, in turn, promotes membership identification and legitimation, ultimately facilitating collective action (Fine 1995). According to Fine (1995), narratives are particularly important for binding movement members together. This is accomplished through various narrative types: horror stories, war stories, and happy endings. In the former, movement members stress negative experiences that justify their participation in a movement, such as women in the feminist movement who share stories of sexism. War stories refer to tales of hardship that movement members experience during their activism, such as dealing with a skeptic. Lastly, happy endings refer to activists' success in creating positive movement-based outcomes. Each narrative functions to bind group members together through forging collective identities, problem solving, and the celebration of attained goals.

The formation of movement identity is also a problem in the sense that identities, while frequently forging members together, are contested resources within movements. One prominent example is Gamson's (1995a) work on queer identity movements, specifically assimilationist/liberationist debates. Assimilationist queer activists believe that they should enforce their identity, emphasizing their similarities to others, while liberationists emphasize the deconstruction of queer identity because identities are, after all, oppressive constructions that must be abolished¹⁷. Each subset has a different collective action frame: assimilationists stress "normality," largely in an effort to legitimate the movement among non-members (e.g., "we're just like you"), while liberationists underscore power, viewing identity categories as not simply forms of difference but hierarchies that oppress marginalized individuals. Gamson's distinction

¹⁷ There are also queer activists who enforce identity, but stress differences rather than similarities to the larger public. "We're here, we're queer, get used to it" expresses the position well.

between assimilationist and liberationist politics also respectively maps well to Weber's ethics as responsibility and as ultimate ends.

Weber's distinction between ethics as responsibility and ethics as ultimate ends is also a dilemma activists may face. A topical example of this tension is found in the Black Lives Matter movement. They tend to practice ethics as ultimate ends, valuing the integrity of their moral position over the consequences of taking those positions. Furthermore, they are explicitly against "respectability politics" as they do not believe that marginalized groups should gain status by adhering to dominant standards of what it means to be a respectable person (Higginbotham 1993; Patton 2014). For example, Black Lives Matter participants often engage in disruptive protests, designed to confront the consciousness of others. They also argue that individuals deserve rights independent of their performance of respectability (Obasogie and Newman 2016). Some critics of the Black Lives Matter movement have argued that the movement could be more effective if they were less disruptive and did not alienate the public. From Weber's perspective, this is a tension between ethics as ultimate ends and ethics of responsibility. The Black Lives Matter protesters value ethics as ultimate ends, whereas critics argue they should engage in responsible politics. Just like the animal activists, there is a tension between ethics as conviction and ethics as responsibility.

The Strategies of the Animal Movement

An important strategic dilemma animal activists encounter is the antinomy between ethics as responsibility and ultimate ends. Though not using Weber's language, in her recent book, Culture and Activism: Animal Rights in France and the United States, Cherry (2016) demonstrates this tension between American and French animal rights activists. She argues that American animal rights activists value pragmatism more than the French, as they focused on the

most effective ways to achieve their goals. For example, many activists tried to persuade the public to eat less meat or become vegan not by simply promoting animal rights, but by linking animal agriculture to poor environmental and personal health outcomes. In other words, the activists broadened their motivational frame to resonate with a larger number of individuals. Many of the activists I interviewed, particularly the welfarists, engaged in the same tactics, as they were concerned about the consequences of their actions rather than the purity of their claims. However, Cherry did not include abolitionist animal activists from the US in her work, even though they provide an important contrast by emphasizing purity over pragmatism.

The animal rights movement does not only face a strategic dilemma in terms of Weber's ethics, but also a variety of strategies they can use to potentially change how humans treat and use animals. For example, Cherry (2010) argues elsewhere that American animal rights activists engage in "boundary shifting" strategies, such as boundary blurring and boundary crossing. The former strategy refers to how activists blur the boundaries between human and animal, demonstrating the similarities between each. For example, some activists said that humans and animals are cousins because they evolved from the same species, or that humans and animals suffer in the same ways. Boundary crossing refers to tactics in which activists crossed boundaries by dressing up as dead or distressed animals, made famous by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). This tactic evokes absent referents (Adams 1990), specifically the absent animals, and how their suffering is similar to human suffering.

Other strategies include the use of moral shocks (Jasper and Poulsen 1995), which are events or situations that induce such outrage in people that they feel compelled to take political action. Moral shocks, especially in animal rights, are frequently enacted through condensing symbols, which are verbal or visual images that neatly capture a range of meanings (Jasper and

Poulsen 1995), such as images of animals in research labs or slaughterhouses. For example, Munro (1997) examined Australia's Coalition Against Duck Shooting (CADS), and found that one of their chief strategies was to create and circulate images representing duck hunts to the mass media. One image showed a hunter dressed as a soldier with a semi-automatic weapon shooting a duck. CADS used the image as moral shock or a prognostic frame (Snow and Bedford 1988) to persuade the public to view duck hunting as excessive and unnecessary violence toward animals.

The literature on animal rights also incorporates Snow et al's (1986) framing processes as a way to make sense of animal rights activism (Jasper and Poulsen 1995, Einwohner 1999, Mika 2006). Snow constructs a variety of frames, but one that is of importance to animal activists is “frame transformation,” which refers to social movement frames that can have transformative effects on individuals, as they see the world in a new light by supplanting old values with new ones. Transformative frames are important to animal activists because they attempt to transform the interpretive frames of the public, and they bind activists together. For example, Jasper and Nelkin (1992) describe an animal activist's meeting in which activists account for their converted state by describing the experiences that propelled them into activism.

In summary, animal activists face strategic dilemmas, just like other social movement members. Animal activists in the US tend to adopt a pragmatic approach, relying on multiple frames to persuade and motivate the public, such as animal cruelty, health, and the environment. Furthermore, activists also try to persuade the public to question the human-animal divide through boundary blurring strategies, and to motivate the public to change their behavior through moral shocks. The animal rights movement, then, perhaps more than other social and civil rights movements, are largely concerned with changing the behavior of individuals as distinct from

changing institutions. While civil rights movements emphasize policy and legislative changes that protect victim groups, the animal rights movement is more likely to stress self-alteration by encouraging individuals to change their behavior. In this sense, the animal rights movement is largely concerned with converting the public, or at the very least altering them, as a means to achieve animal welfare and liberation. This is an important point, one that the literature on animal rights tends to ignore. It is worth examining, then, how animal activists think and go about altering the public. To address this, I now examine the moral strategies of the welfarists and abolitionists and how they rely on Weber's ethics to encourage others to change themselves.

Methods

I distinguished animal rights activists based on their ideologies and actions. I included activists who believe in the regulation of animal use and those who believe in its abolition, comprising welfarists and abolitionists, respectively. I interviewed eighteen welfarists and eight abolitionists from the US to learn more about how they think about presenting animal rights to the public, starting with interviews in the Spring of 2016 until the Fall of 2017. Abolitionists are less common in the US, hence the smaller number of abolitionists interviewees. However, the abolitionists are a group with a high degree of agreement. Indeed, abolitionists have strict social boundaries. To identify as an abolitionist involved strict and unwavering beliefs. Thus, all of my abolitionist interviewees made the same points about activism. In other words, there was a high degree of saturation, and I concluded that more interviews were unnecessary.

Most of the interviewees were white and college educated. During the interviews, I asked participants about how they got involved in animal rights, their activism goals, their approach to activism, their views of effective animal activism, how they present themselves during activism,

and what they think of the animal rights movement in general. Most of the interviews lasted anywhere from one to two hours. All interviewees' names are pseudonyms.

In addition to interviews, I also conducted brief content analysis and observations. Regarding the former, I examined welfarist and abolitionist groups leaflets about animal rights. I analyzed how the groups depict animal suffering, human obligations to animals, and how individuals can help animals. I also conducted seven extended observations, specifically attending protests organized by a welfarist group. Five of the protests were of a local animal store that sold animals as pets. The activists claimed that this store sold dogs from "puppy mills," which the activists considered harmful to the dogs. I also attended two circus protests organized by the same group. These protests questioned the use of wild animals in circus acts. I attended these protests occasionally, starting in 2014 and stopping in 2017. I received permission from the group's organizer to attend the protests as a participant observer, though not all of the protesters knew of my research because protest participation was variable. However, I tried to inform participants of my research if I interacted with them.

Most of the protests had between ten and sometimes twenty attendees. The protests typically lasted around two hours, starting with groups members meeting each other at an agreed upon location. From here, the leader of the group, Kemmy, would bring out signs from her vehicle. These signs were specific to the protest. Some signs asked the public not to shop at the puppy store and others had information about puppy mills. The signs either consisted of large print or images of dogs in puppy mills. During the protests, I usually tried to talk to the protesters about themselves and why they got involved. I tried to be part of near-by interactions to blend in with the group. I also noticed how the public responded to the activists. Typical responses included honks, which the activists interpreted as support, and thumbs up. I personally

experienced someone “flipping me off” so not all responses were positive. Many times, the public would simply drive by without much of a reaction. After the protest was over, I sat in my car and jotted down some notes. From there, I would construct field notes later at home based on my observations.

One limitation of the observations was that I did not get to observe the activists interacting with the public very much. The activists always protested near the entryway of the store plaza or circus, which consisted more of car than foot traffic. As a result, I had to rely on my interview data to ask activists how they interact with the public. While I do make claims about what activists say to the public based on activists' accounts of these exchanges, I take their accounts of lived experiences seriously, as they are capable of “reflexive accountability,” meaning that orderliness of activities is observable and *reportable by members* (Berard 2005). Furthermore, many activists are thoughtful about how they present their moral beliefs to the public, which I discovered and explored during my interviews. In other words, the activists had clear talking points that they wanted to convey, which they could easily relay to me. Nevertheless, the lack of this observational data is a limitation to this research.

I recruited interviewees through my fieldwork and through snowball sampling. Three of the interviewees were recruited during my fieldwork. At the protests, I approached those who seemed comfortable around me and interested in my research and asked them for an interview. No one declined. The other interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling, as I asked interviewees if they knew of other animal activists who might be interested in an interview.

Finally, I transcribed and coded the interviews and fieldnotes, paying attention to activists' beliefs and how they construct effective activism. I coded generally, focusing on themes like beliefs about animal activism, effective activism, various forms of presentation of

self, ethic of responsibility and ethics as ultimate ends. Out of this, ethics as responsibility and ultimate ends emerged as common positions. In the following sections, I present and analyze my evidence by examining the different forms of ethics.

Welfarists: A Tension Between Private and Public Ethics

The welfarists focus on the treatment of animals, and advocate for incremental changes in legislation and individuals to benefit animals. For instance, they support regulatory protections for animals, such as limiting animal confinement, and promote meat reduction and veganism to the public. Many of the individuals I interviewed participate in these goals. For example, some of them collected signatures from the public to propose a bill to the state senate that would limit the intensive confinement of farm animals. They also leaflet, table, or have informal conversations during which they supply vegan literature and rhetorical information to others.

Many of the welfarists believed that humans ought not to harm animals, yet they avoided making claims about human's collective obligation to animals during activism. That is, they usually censored themselves; they did not fully express their private beliefs during activism. This is strategic action, as a frequent issue activists confront is alienating potential sympathizers through their proselytizing (Munro 1997), especially if their activism portrays the public as wrongdoers (Mika 2006). Animal activists are asking individuals to confront and change their deeply ingrained behavior, which could cause conflict. The welfarists typically want to recruit others through activism, rather than alienating them. For example, Carrie, a librarian, explains that activism is about practicality. She would like to "open all the cages and make all farms sanctuaries, but that's just not going to happen." She argued that it is difficult for activists to alter how the public views animals, in part because humans have constructed animals as others. She explains, "We've eaten them for so long, they have to be different." Because she believes

that the public might resist animal rights, she tends to censor her beliefs regarding human-animal relations. In other words, she wants to frame her message in a way to which the public is receptive.

Other welfarists also censored themselves. Jane, a college student, believes that animal consumption is wrong, but she thinks that the public might feel attacked by animal activists who promote such a message. She explained “I think it’s wrong” but she feels she cannot freely express that perspective to the public because some individuals “are dissuaded because they’ve been told you’ve been doing something wrong right now.” Similarly, I asked Emma, an undergraduate student majoring in resource economics, if she tells individuals that consuming animal products is wrong. She said, “I say it’s cruel. I think people get extremely offended when you insult their morality, or you say they’re not moral. They do not like that.” Importantly, Emma later explained that she believes that animal consumption is wrong: “I mean that’s my belief system and that’s why I do what I do, but I don’t think I’ve said that ever.” Lastly, Kyleen, an animal activist of thirty years, also believes that animal consumption is wrong, yet she is concerned about the consequences of framing her message that way to the public. She explained:

It’s something I’m passionate about, and I do believe, and to be honest with you, I do in some ways think it’s wrong, but I think labeling, you know, if you label “that’s wrong,” then you’re just setting it up somehow for people to say, well what makes you, you know, like morally superior?

Kyleen further explained that framing animal rights as a collective obligation would alienate the public. They could become defensive because they feel that the activists are judging them. In

total, many welfarists believe that they cannot express their collectivist beliefs regarding animal rights as it may perturb the public.

The welfarists are good representations of Weber's ethic of responsibility, as they give a great deal of thought regarding how their activism may affect the public. They overwhelmingly feel that if activists alienate the public through collective moral discourse, the public will not adopt animal rights ideologies, consistent with the ethic of responsibility's emphasis on prudence over purity. For example, Jane believes that individuals are unreceptive to an "all or nothing" ultimatum, such as presenting animal rights or veganism as a moral obligation. For Jane, framing animal rights as a collective moral obligation will result in the public feeling alienated and therefore unlikely to adopt an animal rights ideology. Instead, she thinks that animal activists need to tone down their moral message, and think about how the public might consider animal rights. She believes activists should not present animal rights as a larger moral obligation because individuals might feel threatened. She explained, "I don't think people are going to change their opinions just being attacked, and if we want long term sustainable change, people have to come to these conclusions that it's wrong on their own." Jane, like other welfarists, believe that they should not push the public toward animal rights, but rather help them understand the larger problem and let them evaluate it using their own moral terms.

Other welfarists avoid public expressions of their convictions, worrying about the consequences of expressing their convictions while participating in activism. For example, Charlyn, an undergraduate at a local university, explained her approach to animal rights to me, saying, "So my philosophy—I usually don't even get to talk about this because I even have vegan friends who aren't in the same space as me—but my philosophy is that we were never meant to eat these animals. These animals have the equal right to live." She believes that humans

and animals' lives are equal, but she also notes that the public is unreceptive to such a moral position. Like the other welfarists, Charlyn does not want to alienate the public and thus tends to censor her moral beliefs about animals, reasoning "I don't say this (it's wrong) because it's very intimidating to people and they get intimidated." In reference to animal use as morally wrong, she further explained, "When I'm having conversations with people I'm not super comfortable talking to about it, because I just get really nervous that I'm going to come off super preachy and people are just going to get turned off by it." Like Jane, Charlyn practices an ethic of responsibility; she is concerned that if she stresses animal rights as a collective obligation, others will find animal rights unappealing, an unwanted outcome. In summary, the welfarists think harming animals is wrong, but rarely relay that message while participating in activism. As I will show in the next section, the welfarists compromise their values in the interests of strategy.

Welfarists: Commitment to Responsible Activism

While the welfarists are a fair representation of Weber's ethic of responsibility, they also complicate Weber's conceptualization in an important way. The welfarists do not simply demonstrate a concern for the consequences of their conduct. Instead, I argue that they demonstrate a *commitment to the means they envision will bring about those consequences*. The ethic of responsibility, then, is not neatly divorced from an ethic of ultimate ends. That is, welfarists feel a conviction that their strategy will cause others to adopt animal rights ideologies. Their strategy is their moral commitment, as they believe their approach is effective. The welfarists chief strategy is the use of conventional cultural resources, particularly individualism, but also its variations, including tolerance and pluralism, to alter others. That is, animal activists use common cultural values to persuade the public to engage in unconventional acts such as limiting animal use or adopting veganism. They feel that many Americans dismiss veganism as

extreme (Cooney 2013) and are unwilling to limit their animal use. Consequently, they strategically avoid using “radical ” moralistic language about animals, instead opting to emphasize values that they believe the public holds in order to resonate with people’s lived experiences (Snow and Benford 1988) or plausibility structures (Berger and Luckman 1966). Thus, like Weber’s portrayal of an ethic of responsibility, the welfarists are not committed to expressing their value orientations; while they privately believe animal consumption is wrong, they do not convey such moral beliefs to the public. Yet, contrary to Weber’s portrayal of an ethic of responsibility, the welfarists feel a moral commitment to improving the lives of animals. In so doing, they come to moralize strategies themselves. In this sense, an ethic of responsibility is not only compatible with an ethic of ultimate ends but an expression of it.

One objection to my interpretation of Weber’s ethics of responsibility is that Weber would not disagree that responsible activists can still have commitments. After all, it is an *ethic* of responsibility. But, like ethics as ultimate ends, the welfarists’ commitments were at times unwavering. That is, they believed in their strategy as the only viable option. As explained above, many welfarists did not support the presentation of animal rights as a collective obligation because it would not convert people. They put their foot down and could do no other. In this case, they cannot imagine that an abolitionist strategy would produce the intended results.

One important proselytizing strategy the welfarists employed was presenting animal rights under the prism of American individualism. According to Bellah et al (1985) and many others, Americans tend to think of many aspects of public and private life in individualistic terms, meaning that they emphasize choices and experiences over collective commitments to community and the public good. Consequently, many Americans believe that they are free to achieve goals, desires, and happiness without others telling them how to do so (Jensen 1995).

Many of the activists were aware that most people want to eat animal products, and do not care for activists who tell them otherwise. Thus, instead of presenting animal rights as an absolutist morality, which many of them privately believed, many activists presented animal rights in individualistic terms. For example, Emma tries not to offend the moral sensibilities of others while engaging in activism by giving the impression that she is not forcing people to change but giving them information to make an informed decision. She said:

I think it's also telling people to eat less meat instead of eating no meat that really helps. The Humane League Labs, they've done a ton of studies about how certain things work... Not like how can we make people vegetarians, but save the most animals in general. So they were going through each statement (to use in a leaflet) and they said "go vegetarian," "eat less meat," "go vegan," and "eat less meat" worked the best because people were like 'oh ok, I can do that. I don't feel like I'm being forced to do something. I can do that,' you know?

Emma practices an ethic of responsibility, yet she also clearly demonstrates a commitment to her means because they yield desirable ends. Emma feels dedicated to an individualistic strategy for altering others, as it will lead to favorable consequences. For example, she believes in crafting a moral message that caters to individual's experiences and desires as the ideal method to alter others. The message allows others to engage in meat eating, yet encourages them to eat less meat as a morally commendable act. They can have their meat and eat it, too. Emma believes this is an effective approach because targets do not feel coerced to convert but encouraged to alter themselves. In this context, morality is not an imposition of what is right, but an individual decision about the right way to live. Indeed, Emma remarks that this is her central

approach to activism, expressing, “I’m not forcing you to do it. I’m just having you think about it in this way... And let yourself think about that and then go with what you want.” In her activism, Emma possesses a value commitment to strategy, not to larger moral worldviews. She is committed to individualism as a strategy, demonstrating that, contrary to Weber, those who practice an ethic of responsibility also show a commitment to ultimate ends.

Similarly, Shirley, a mental health counselor, also demonstrates an ethic of responsibility as she believes that individualism is an effective tactic to alter others. She told me that she used to be very direct with people about animal rights, such as telling people that they should be ashamed for consuming animal products, and comparing animal agriculture to the Holocaust. Predictably, others did not respond positively to her, and she now engages in what she calls “peaceful activism,” which she claims is “an opportunity for someone to grapple. Instead of being like you do this. Which I think is pretty basic human psychology, right? If I’m just like ‘you, you, you.’ It’s like I statements, right? It’s providing facts.” Given her prior experiences, Shirley is concerned about the consequences of her activism. She does not want to blame others, but focuses on her beliefs and larger facts about animal agriculture. In addition, she rarely tells others that consuming animal products is wrong because “I think that’s what got people really defensive.” In Shirley’s view, to construct morality as a collective obligation is to blame others who do not adhere to the larger code of conduct. She thus practices an ethic of responsibility by avoiding such discourse.

Yet, Shirley, like other welfarists, also shows how practicing an ethic of responsibility involves moral commitment to strategy. Like other welfarists, Shirley values “effective activism,” which emphasizes the best means to an end. Shirley thinks effective activism is “to have people think about the reality of their participation without a sense of blame but inviting a

sense of responsibility.” Shirley’s approach is not to blame others for wrongdoing and tell them how they should live, but to provide information to them so they can make educated decisions about and feel responsible for their participation in animal use. Morality is reduced to what individuals are willing to do rather than what they ought to do. For Shirley and many others, presenting morality in such a way is a strategy to resonate with others, to bridge frames (Snow et al 1986). As Shirley recognizes, rigid standards of morality often alienate others, especially in an individualistic culture (Bellah et al 1985). Jane shares Shirley’s views, believing that if animal activists tell the public they should go vegan “they feel attacked.” In response, Shirley and Jane see their activism as an opportunity to inform others in hopes they make some changes in their lives. Both Shirley and Jane are not so much driven by their convictions regarding how animals should be treated, but by their tactics to create change. They practice an ethic of responsibility, yet they also demonstrate how such an ethic involves moral commitments, particularly to specific means that may lead to desirable outcomes.

Activists also practice an ethic of responsibility by invoking an individualized proselytizing strategy of “personalizing” morality, which refers to the ways the activists present animal rights frames in terms of how they connect to the experiences, desires, and values of others. The activists try to find “where others are” and cater their message accordingly. For instance, Kyleen worked on gathering signatures for a local ballot initiative to increase the space for farm animals to move. She believes these incremental changes are effective because:

I think you really have to meet people where they are... I’m vegan and I want no exploitation of animals, but the public at large isn’t that way so these standards for the ballot initiative that we’re doing about the confinement, some people see

that as small measures, and that it's not even acceptable, but I feel like it's really necessary to start small and where people are at.

Kyleen further explained that “meeting people where they are” means that activists should frame their message with the attitudes of others in mind. She believes that many individuals are not open to veganism, but they are open to the humane treatment of farm animals. Or some activists find that others are more interested in the health benefits of veganism rather than the welfare of farm animals, so they emphasize personal health as a way to connect with others.

Note that Kyleen feels a tension. She wants no exploitation of animals, yet she advocates for measures that actually result in what she thinks of as animal exploitation. That is, she wants every cage to be free of animals, but she gathered signatures that keep animals in cages, albeit bigger ones. In Weber's sense, she clearly practices an ethic of responsibility. Her activism is not so much driven by her convictions about animal rights. Indeed, she seems to advocate for legislation she does not believe in. However, she practices responsible activism in that sense that she advocates on behalf of animals so long as her activism is in line with public support. For example, she does not think the public will accept her convictions of “no exploitation” of animals. In response, practicing an ethic of responsibility, she and other activists attempt to change others based on “less exploitation” of animals, which the welfarists largely believe will yield positive outcomes, as the public seemingly supports the regulation of animal use over the abolition of it.

Kyleen, however, in another way *does* engage in activism she believes in. While her moderate activism and extreme convictions are seemingly at odds, she also holds convictions about doing activism. Like Shirley and Jane, she believes in doing what is most effective,

meaning she believes in engaging in activism that produces positive outcomes. As I have stressed but as Weber did not, it is in this sense that Weber's ethic of responsibility involves conviction, but not toward one's value orientations but toward one's proselytizing strategies. In general, the activists feel certain that they can alter the public by emphasizing things that they feel the public already values. For example, Kyleen's proselytizing and activism summon two different values to alter others: individualism (morality is adjusted to individuals) and humane treatment of animals (rather than no exploitation of animals). She further believes more absolutist messages, such as "eating animals is wrong," are ineffective because "I don't want people to feel judged, but somehow coming to it from a not harming perspective." By emphasizing values recruits potentially already believe, Kyleen hopes to minimize conflict and thereby maximize alteration. Kyleen thus practices a modified ethic of responsibility. Responsibility is itself a commitment.

Other activists also emphasized personalized morality as a method of responsible activism. For example, Sue argued that activism is effective by stressing the gravity of the problem, but also making the issue relatable to people. She explained:

So like relating it to like if they had a pet or—because I had pet chickens when I was a kid— or if they have been to a farm, or anything like that. Making it something that they can personally relate to, not just nine billion animals are killed, like make it so that of those nine billion, one of those was going to be your pet chicken when you were a kid.

Sue tries to connect with others by demonstrating how aspects of their lives, such as caring for pets, are connected to larger problems in animal agriculture. She further explained that she tries

to “tailor everything I’m saying to each person” during activism, such as leafleting. For example, she said that if people appear unreceptive to animal rights, she does not engage with that person. Or if another person is concerned about their cholesterol, she will emphasize the health benefits of veganism. This is an individualistic approach to activism in the sense that she is trying to frame her messages according to the experiences, needs, and desires of potential converts. Sue enacts an ethic of responsibility, as she believes that this personalized approach is relatable to the public. Yet, her responsible activism still includes convictions, not toward justice for animals but toward her proselytizing strategies.

Welfarists also evoked tolerance, a cousin of individualism, as a form of responsible activism. Activists sometimes showed tolerance of others who violated their beliefs about animal rights. For example, Kayla, who has been involved in animal activism since the late 1970s and believes that “every animal should be free” and feels that eating animals is unethical, does not think that activists should tell others that eating animals is wrong because:

If there’s a family that depends on killing an animal and using it for their food, or they have a farm, or they use it. I mean I’m not saying... I don’t think I have the right to tell somebody that they shouldn’t be eating meat, um, or can’t. I mean some people are poor, some people it’s their livelihood, so I want to respect there are farms that do that.

Kayla explains further that “food and maybe clothes too, are such an emotional thing. I mean you grow up with foods however you’ve been raised. So if you’ve been eating meat all your life, it’s sort of a comfort.” Kayla largely tolerates other’s meat consumption by empathizing with their life circumstances, including, in her words, their “culture, economic abilities, class, and

customs.” If people grew up on a farm, are poor, or feel connected to meat eating she understands why they might eat meat even though she disagrees with the practice. Their individual situation outweighs a larger collective morality; because of their circumstances, certain individuals are inculpable.

Kayla also practices a modified form of an ethic of responsibility, as she is concerned about the consequences of her activism, and therefore does not impose her moral viewpoints onto others, yet she also views this strategy as a conviction for altering others. While Kayla thinks that eating animals is unethical, she does struggle with imposing that viewpoint onto others because she believes it may be difficult for some individuals to give up animal products. Instead, she tries to inform others, asserting “I don’t want to tell people what to do, but I want to educate people.” Her tolerance of others thus is manifested in her activism more generally, as she does not tell others how to live but instead provides information that people can use to spark change within themselves. Kayla’s tolerance is a strategy rooted in conviction of how to best create change. By showing that she is understanding of others, she feels that they are more likely to listen to her message because it “does not scare but invites others to participate.”

Welfarists also use individualism by invoking pluralism, which is the belief that individuals, typically Americans, largely tolerate cultural or group differences. Pluralism involves the acceptance of the lifestyles of various identity groups in a society. Not all activists invoked pluralism, since it was not always relevant to their activism. However, like individualism and tolerance, pluralism is a form of cultural and moral relativism. For instance, Jane told me about an activism event called “pay-per-view” in which she and other activists pay passersby a dollar to watch a video showing animal slaughter. Afterwards, the activists talk to the viewers about their feelings. One viewer, who was Muslim, talked about how the video

showed extreme cruelty, but he did not participate in such actions because he eats halal meat. He believed that halal was synonymous with humane. Jane looked it up and felt that it was just as cruel as the video footage. She remarked:

He obviously doesn't want to deal with the fact that maybe it is cruel, you know?

So we're trying to be open minded because we didn't want to feel like we insulted him, or, oh it's actually bad look at this, you know? It's like insulting his religion so it's weird. It's strange.

Jane said that she did not press his belief, because she did not want to offend him. She did not want to dismiss his position because he could interpret it as an assault on his religion, particularly with recent concerns about Islamophobia. However, consistent with her individualistic approach, she is also concerned that by disagreeing with his position, she might alienate and offend him, which, in Jane's view, might deter him from considering animal rights. She clearly practices an ethic of responsibility, yet she also shows how she is committed to responsibility in and of itself.

In summary, the welfarists practice an ethic of responsibility. They thought about the consequences of their activism. Many believed that using individualistic discourse would lead to desirable outcomes, as the public would not feel alienated or offended by their claims. However, while welfarists are good examples of Weber's depiction of ethically responsible individuals who forgo their convictions during moral chasms, welfarists did maintain beliefs they would not compromise. This is important because the welfarists show that the division between Weber's ethics is not very clear in practice. While the welfarists are easily categorized as responsible activists, they also displayed an ethic of ultimate ends—in part because they never lost sight of their ultimate concerns with animal welfare but also because they converted

strategic considerations themselves into ultimate values. In many cases, welfarists viewed strategy as a non-negotiable commitment. They viewed the strategy of desirable outcomes as the best way to alter the behavior of the public. Indeed, they largely believed that moral absolutism would not work as a strategy. They viewed their ethic of responsibility, then, as an ultimate end. Strategy thus involves commitments (usually to individualistic morality) that welfarists take as non-negotiable. Overall, the activists' responsible activism centered around a commitment to strategy. They strategically used individualistic discourse to convince others that they are empathetic, tolerant, and inclusive, convinced that such a strategy will advance animal rights.

Abolitionists: Commitment to Ultimate Ends

In contrast to the welfarists, the abolitionists represent ethics as ultimate ends, as Clay, a leader of an abolitionist group, demonstrates. Clay told me a story about how he stopped Whole Foods Market from selling a nutrition bar. The bar was labeled vegan but contained "humane honey." He argued that this was false advertising, since honey is an animal product, and pressured Whole Foods to stop selling the bar. The owner of the company that made the bar contacted Clay, and he told Clay that "he knows vegans" and they said the bar was vegan. Clay retorted that they were not vegans because vegans do not eat honey. The owner wanted to sell the rest of the product, and then change the packaging so it was not advertised as vegan. Clay, however, was still adamant that Whole Foods remove the bars from their shelves. Clay remarked to me, "That's what it means to be abolitionist. You put your foot down, and you stand for your principles." In Weber's terms, that spirit is what it means to practice an ethic of ultimate ends. Clay stood for his principles; he could do no other.

The abolitionist approach is centered around the idea that the property status of animals should be abolished because animals are sentient beings. For example, Joyce, an abolitionist who is a civics high school teacher, argues that “because animals are living, sentient beings, they have a right to their lives... Humans then cannot use them for their own ends.” While the abolitionists agree with the welfarists that harming animals is wrong, they are much more likely to link the harming of animals to their property status. They argue that if animals are legally things, humans will treat them as objects without interests. These ideas stem from philosopher Gary Francione’s (2000) work on animal rights, who created the abolitionist approach. The abolitionists I interviewed all shared Francione’s ideas, and mentioned how they were influenced by him. For example, Clay heard Francione on an animal rights podcast and was profoundly moved by his abolitionist message. Clay said that Francione’s message was that since animals are property, animal interests will always matter less than human interests, perpetuating the exploitation of animals. Consequently, Clay and other abolitionists maintain that humans need to treat similar interests similarly, and thus dismantle the property status of animals to abolish the unnecessary harm humans cause animals.

The abolitionists are very critical of the regulation of animal use, something welfarists often promote. The welfarists frequently advocate for making incremental changes to improve the lives of animals. While many welfarists believe that harming animals is wrong, they tend to take a pragmatic approach to animal rights, believing that incremental changes will serve animals best. As mentioned above, welfarists largely believe that “extremist” frames, such as the abolition of animal use, will alienate the public. Instead, they might promote Meatless Mondays or larger cages for confined farm animals. The abolitionists think the welfarist approach is problematic, as they contend it violates the rights of animals. For instance, Clay

wants the public to understand that “animals matter,” which means “that we shouldn’t be using them as things because that is inherently harmful to them... it doesn’t mean eating cage-free eggs instead of battery cage eggs, it means eating no eggs.” For abolitionists, the regulation of animal use is wrong because it maintains the property status of animals.

During activism, abolitionists were upfront about their views with the public, often stressing that humans cannot justify animal use. The most common forms of abolitionist activism include tabling or interpersonal/conversational activism. According to Joyce, a typical tabling session includes a few abolitionists sitting behind a table with posters of animals with captions about going vegan. When people approach the table, the abolitionists will try to have a conversation about veganism as a moral imperative. Joyce notes that sometimes people want to talk about veganism as a healthy diet, but she will usually say “That’s not what we’re about.” The abolitionists usually try to steer the conversation by asking questions to the individuals who approach the table. Joyce and the other abolitionists *all* ask, “do you think it’s wrong to harm animals unnecessarily?” Joyce said, “Most people will say yes, not all, but most people will say yes. And that’s really when you get to talk about how eating them or using them as items of clothing is not necessary, it’s something you do because you like it.”

The abolitionists are important largely because they emphasize morality as a collective commitment rather than an individual decision, at odds with how Americans often talk about morality (Bellah et al 1985). Abolitionists do not personalize morality, but present it as a collective obligation so that animal rights is a matter of right or wrong. Their goal is to stand up for what they believe is right in an effort to educate others about humans’ moral commitments to animals. This means that their central message is that animal use is wrong and therefore individuals should become ethical vegans. For example, Clay argued “We get out there with an

uncompromising abolitionist stance, and it's not about being militant or fundamentalist. It's about saying things how they are." For Clay, an abolitionist stance means promoting the end of the human consumption of animals. He wants members of the public who approach him during his activism to "understand that animal use is wrong... use is the problem, it's not how we treat them." Joyce feels similarly, saying, "I think that it's a really awful, terrible system that should be completely dismantled. I think the amount of pain and suffering that goes on daily, it's hard to think about... So the whole system should be dismantled, it's just so clear to me." Joyce and Clay both emphasize the abolishment of animal use, as they argue that humans should not own and use animals, a message they try to impart to the public. Clay and other abolitionists were adamant that the animal rights movement needs to be clear and direct about this issue so that the public is not confused as to what is expected of them. If there is no need to use and harm animals, abolitionists maintain that there is no justification to use and harm animals. Rather than a choice, abolitionists see veganism as a collective obligation.

In Weberian terms, the abolitionists are clear contrasts to the welfarists. While the welfarists enact an ethic of responsibility by promoting incremental changes and relying on individualistic discourse that will not perturb the public in the name of effectiveness, abolitionists enact an ethic of ultimate ends by advocating the end of animal use and emphasizing morality as collective obligation. The abolitionists promote veganism as a moral baseline, seemingly unconcerned if their message offends the public. For example, Joyce bluntly remarked:

A lot of people, once you get to that step (talking about veganism as a moral imperative), they're just turned off and don't want to talk anymore. Like you've got them in this contradiction where they don't want to harm animals

unnecessarily, yet that's what they do all the time. So I think with most people the conversation will end around there. Some will think about it, some will, you know, even get a little irritated. And then other people will be like, yeah well but I could never do without my cheese and things like that.

Joyce seemingly values the integrity of her message over the negative effects it has on the public. Abolitionists care, then, deeply about the integrity of their message, even if that message alienates others, embodying Weber's ethic of ultimate ends.

To stop here, however, would mean missing the larger story. The abolitionists believe in the integrity of their message, but they do not totally ignore the consequences of their activism. While abolitionists concede that their framing of animal rights may upset others, and this may indicate that they are indifferent to the effects of their activism, the abolitionists, to a degree, *want* to upset others, at least in terms of creating moral conflict within a person. The abolitionists' larger goal is to "change the paradigm" so that humans no longer regard animals as objects without interests but as nonhuman persons. To change the paradigm, they feel they must promote veganism as an imperative because *it will create conflict* within a person. That is, they want the public to see how their beliefs about animals and themselves are at odds with their behavior of harming animals. If individuals believe it is wrong to unnecessarily harm animals, yet actually harm animals unnecessarily, abolitionists think that it will unsettle those individuals to be confronted with the contradiction of their own positions. As Clay argues:

I guarantee you, when they walk away (from their table), they'll have cognitive dissonance in their brains, that's how you get change. Things don't change unless you have two competing beliefs and you're trying to reconcile which one you are

trying to go with. People in the long run are going to go with the one that makes them feel like they're being true to their identity; the one that they feel represents their better selves. In the short run, they may still do what feels good, but they will probably feel bad about it.

Unlike the welfarists, who do not want to make others feel uncomfortable and therefore rely on individualistic discourse, the abolitionists want to create moral tension within others to evoke an awakening within them. The abolitionists, then, show how those who practice an ethic of ultimate ends may not only stand for what's right in and of itself, but also strategize to alter others. That is, the abolitionists stand for what they think is right both out of principle (animal use is wrong) and consequence (promoting veganism will create change).

Abolitionists: Ultimate Ends as Strategy

Contrary to Weber's depiction of individuals who practice an ethic of ultimate ends, the abolitionists do not simply value the integrity of their message, unconcerned with how it affects the public. Rather, they also believe that their uncompromising message is the best way to create social change that benefits animals. That is, abolitionists are motivated by ultimate ends, not simply because these ends are right in and of themselves, but, contrary to Weber, because they have strategic value. Practicing an ethic of ultimate ends, then, does not mean forgoing an ethic of responsibility. Using the abolitionists, I argue that ultimate ends have strategic uses and, by extension, that the distinction between ethics of ultimate ends and ethics as responsibility is more complex than Weber would have had it.

The abolitionists, while deeply invested in their beliefs of the abolition of animal use, also believed that their viewpoint of abolitionism has strategic value. They believe it is the best

way to create large scale social change that actually benefits animals. To accomplish this, abolitionists argue that they must have conversations with individuals about the morality of animal use. Clay argued:

This is a long haul, and what we need to do is build a foundation. We need to create a world in which the paradigm has shifted from one in which animals are ours to use to one in which it is improper to use them, and people don't see them as things to use. And we're not going to get there except for one brick at a time, that means having as many fruitful conversations as possible around the world, and if it's not going to be a fruitful conversation, move on, we don't have time.

There are so many other people to talk to.

Abolitionists make the point that changing the minds of others does not mean telling them what they want to hear, such as promoting the reduction of animal use as a moral act. They believe that to get people to go vegan, they must educate others about veganism as a moral imperative. Their goal is to encourage the public to see animal use as unjust on the grounds that it has no justification, especially if the best justification is human pleasure or convenience. Abolitionists are adamant that if they are to persuade others that animal use is wrong, they must tell them it is wrong. For example, an abolitionist pamphlet from the International Vegan Society starts with the sentence, "Harming animals without good reason is wrong." Overall, the pamphlet tries to get the reader to see how harming animals unnecessarily is wrong and that humans have a moral imperative to avoid animal consumption (in comparison, a Vegan Outreach pamphlet (2014: 14), which emphasizes welfarism is entitled "Compassionate Choices" and encourages the reader to "choose compassion whenever possible"). Clay argues that this approach is necessary because

“if you don’t get people to see with really laser-like precision what’s expected of them, you’re not going to get the desired results.”

Clay is clearly concerned about the consequences of his activism. He is focused on achieving “desired results” through his abolitionist message, believing that it will persuade individuals to adopt veganism and view animals as nonhuman persons. He further explained, “you don’t get there unless you start pointing people in that direction... this is what we believe, this is where we need to go, we’re not going to get there unless we point in that direction.” Clay, however, understands that this is a difficult task, as the public may draw a hard line between human and animal, and consequently is more open to reducing animal consumption than eliminating it. He argued, however, “We’re trying to change the world. We’re trying to change the paradigm. We’re trying to get rights for animals. If it wasn’t a little bit hard, why weren’t we already there, you know what I mean?” Though Clay understands that converting the public is difficult, he is adamant that the abolitionist approach is the best or most responsible way to go about it.

Abolitionists value responsible activism, so much so that they often argue that their approach is more effective than welfarism because it will produce measurable results. Clay argued that dismantling institutionalized animal use will come about through an abolitionist message, not a welfarist one:

The paradigm shift will be faster. In fact, there is no paradigm shift on a welfare approach. There’s no challenge to the mainstream thinking that it’s wrong to use animals in the first place, so unless a group like us and others around the world are specifically pushing back on this idea that we can use animals and are justified

in doing so, the movement is never going to change. Animal rights will never come about as a legal matter much less a moral one.

Clay desires change for animals. He does not value the purity of his principles over the outcomes of his actions. He values both.

Overall, abolitionists were critical of the welfarists' strategy of responsible activism for a couple of reasons. First, abolitionists argue that the welfarist approach does not dismantle animal agriculture. Instead, many welfarists encourage individuals to consume fewer animal products, but Clay argues that "there's this weird idea out there that there's other ways of helping animals that still leaves the system completely intact." This is perhaps the most obvious critique that abolitionists have of welfarism. In other words, welfarism is problematic because it regulates rather than abolishes animal use, which is antithetical to the abolitionist approach both in principle and consequence. As Joyce remarks, "Having more room for the animals to move around is not going to cause any sort of paradigm shift." Abolitionists believe that their approach is better for changing the larger paradigm.

Second, and more strategically, the abolitionists argue that the welfarists' message is unclear, especially when they encourage the public to consume fewer animal products as a moral act. Both groups have different definitions of what effective activism entails. For the welfarists, it involves asking individuals to make small changes, notably reducing their animal consumption, that over time may help liberate animals. For the abolitionists, effective activism involves being clear what morality demands of people, and as such they advocate ethical veganism and nothing less. According to abolitionists, while welfarists care about and advocate for animals, they also advocate measures that ironically harm animals, like Meatless Mondays, larger cages for confined animals, or less animal consumption. Abolitionists maintain that this is

ineffective activism because it sends individuals incoherent and even immoral messages, particularly the notion that individuals can help animals while simultaneously harming them. For example, Clay argued this about welfarists:

To them, effectiveness is getting people to do something even if it's not the right thing. And my feeling... if you put the ladder up on the wrong wall you can climb up to the top, but how are you going to change the light bulb? It's over there on the other wall. Being effective is making steps in the right direction, so no one is more effective than abolitionists because we're the only ones who put one step in front of the other towards the goal of abolition. We're actually changing the paradigm one conversation at a time. That is something that just does not happen in the welfarist's realm. And that's why we're effective.

Clay believes that the abolitionist approach is the more direct way to get from point A to point B. In other words, it is the most effective way of achieving his goals. Abolitionists want a vegan world, so they advocate for one rather than equivocate. Joyce furthermore argues that welfarists' responsible activism actually results in poor outcomes. She said that the welfarists "are telling people that it's okay to eat meat six times a week, as long as you give it up one day. Like I don't see how talking about meatless Monday is going to lead people to go vegan." In addition, Cynthia, an accountant, argues that "welfarism gives people the wrong message, that it's okay to harm animals. How is that effective? It does not give a clear message." Not only do Joyce and Cynthia question whether advocating reduced meat consumption will encourage others to become vegan, but they importantly think it is counter-productive because, in Joyce's words, it will "make people comfortable about eating meat." In other words, Joyce and other

abolitionists believe that the welfarists' approach is problematic *because it will result in undesirable consequences*. Abolitionists, then, do not simply tell others that veganism is a moral obligation out of the integrity of their principles, but also because they believe it will yield beneficial outcomes.

This is not to say that abolitionists think that the public is likely to go vegan overnight. While they think their approach is effective, they also acknowledged that many individuals are incredulous of veganism. Joyce stated, "...at a certain point you're going to alienate people because people do things a certain way, they've done it that way their whole lives, their family does it, their friends do it." Yet, unlike welfarists, Joyce and other abolitionists do not believe they should frame their message with less morally charged language. Joyce, for example, does not think the alternative is to promote less than veganism. She said, "but if at least I can have some sort of dialogue with people where they at least see why I'm saying what I'm saying then maybe they'll think about it later, who knows." Clay feels similarly, as he wants to clearly explain to them why veganism is a moral imperative. He said, "People usually walk away from our table and don't feel compelled to go vegan on the spot because there's a lot of that denial, pushback, and other hang-ups, but they'll often say, 'wow, I really understand it now, I never understood it before.'" Joyce and Clay admit that there are limitations to the effectiveness of their approach; the public is unlikely to welcome veganism with open arms. But they both seem hopeful that over time the abolitionist message will marinate in the minds of the public, perhaps converting some of the public to veganism.

I have discussed how abolitionists in general practice not only an ethic of ultimate ends but also that of responsibility. But what specific strategies do abolitionists use in their responsible activism? To attain their desired results—individuals converting to veganism—

abolitionists strategically connect with the plausibility structures of many Americans by presenting morality as the avoidance of unnecessary harm. Many Americans believe that it is wrong to cause harm to others (Bellah et al 1985), especially if that harm is unnecessary. This moral belief, however, is not unique to Americans, as it is central to many moralities around the world, though what is considered harm to others is socially constructed (Haidt 2012).

Abolitionists use this morality as a resource, often encouraging the public to think about *how what they already believe* relates to animals. For example, in the International Vegan Society abolitionist pamphlet, the first heading is titled “What Everyone Already Believes.” This section claims that “the idea that it’s wrong to unnecessarily harm animals is moral common sense (2017: 2). In other words, just about everyone feels that harming animals without reason is wrong. Furthermore, Gary Francione (2000), abolitionist animal rights scholar, argues that so many Americans condemned Michael Vick’s dog fighting not because he treated a pet as a thing, but because he had no sufficient reason to harm the dogs other than it gave him some pleasure. That is, many Americans believe that individuals need good reasons to harm animals; pleasure is not one of those reasons. Abolitionists use this moral logic, one that many individuals already hold, to convince others to go vegan.

Abolitionists try to frame animal rights in ways to which the public is receptive, much like the welfarists. However, unlike the welfarists, they do not draw on the cultural resource of individualism, but the moral resource of avoiding harm. For example, Kristen, a pediatrician, told me a story about taking a cab in New York City. She was wearing a vegan t-shirt, and the cab driver asked her about veganism. She used the moral logic of avoiding unnecessary harm to talk about veganism. “I told him that humans cannot justify animal consumption because there is no need for it. We had a really great conversation. He was pretty curious. As I was leaving, he

told me that I convinced him to try veganism.” Kristen was very happy with this outcome, noting that “it pays off to be direct with people.” Kristen’s beliefs are not simply unbridled stances; they are also forms of responsible activism that she feels will convert the public. Similarly, Jessi, who has been vegan for over twenty-five years, explained to me “We have to tell people like it is. If it is wrong to cause unnecessary harm, we must be clear that it is wrong.” She understands that this can turn people away from her table, but she ultimately feels that abolitionism is the most effective approach for changing the public because “it is the most direct.”

The abolitionists not only strategize by presenting morality in terms many individuals find agreeable, but by also creating moral discomfort within individuals, as mentioned earlier. In other words, the abolitionists try to get others to reconcile their beliefs and behaviors, specifically their belief that it is wrong to cause unnecessary harm to animals with their behaviors of using animal products. The abolitionists believe that if they are to change the property status of animals, they must convince others that their moral beliefs are consistent with animal rights but inconsistent with their behavior. In pointing out the contradiction between individuals’ beliefs and behaviors, they can create cognitive dissonance within a person. Unlike welfarists, who might think of this as alienating a potential convert, abolitionists see this dissonance as necessary for changing how humans think about the moral status of animals. As Clay argues “People want to reconcile stuff that’s complicated and difficult.” Joyce takes this approach, as she argued that she wants the public to come to terms with their inconsistent beliefs and behaviors, noting that people are troubled by the slaughtering of animals yet still consume animal products. She said, “What I guess I’m trying to do is to make people start making connections between their behavior and their beliefs about the treatment of animals.” Clay also provides a good explanation of this approach:

You believe it's wrong to harm a dog, right? You wouldn't come home from work and kick a dog and think that was a good thing to do, right? You'll feel bad because you hurt the dog, right? Not because you damaged your property. And once you get people equipped to see things in the right way, they end up with this cognitive dissonance where 'well I think I'm a good person, and I thought I could be a good person and eat animal products', but I also believe that animals matter and what happens matters to them, and yet what I'm doing actually harms them. Now I have to, am I going to be vegan or am I not going to be vegan? Am I going to be a hypocrite or be consistent?... Our job is to get people to start being consistent as possible with what we already believe about animals.

Clay argues that "veganism is the only way to reconcile your behavior and beliefs." Clay is not simply standing up for what he believes in. He also believes that standing up for what he believes in can result in beneficial demonstrable changes. Clay is motivated just as much by his moral principles than his strategic actions. His strategy is also influenced by his views of human personhood, specifically that humans will strive to be morally consistent in order to see themselves in a positive light.

Conclusion

By empirically examining Weber's distinction between ethics as responsibility and ethics as ultimate ends, I have argued that the distinction is more nuanced than Weber acknowledges. The welfarists and abolitionists, on the surface, appear to substantiate Weber's ideal type. However, upon further investigation, it is clear that both groups complicate Weber's distinction, as they each practice responsibility and conviction, though in different ways.

In line with Weber, the welfarists are concerned about the consequences of their activism; they believe that the best way to alter others is to not offend their moral sensibilities, and consequently they often relied on individualistic language to connect with the plausibility structures of the public. However, what Weber failed to realize is that responsible activism still involves conviction, as “responsibility” or “concern with consequences” becomes an end in and of itself. While the welfarists are not publicly committed to their moral convictions—they do not stress veganism as a moral obligation—they *are* committed to their strategy of responsibility. In short, they are committed to the idea that in order to alter others, they must not offend their moral sensibilities. They must not tell others how to live.

In addition, consistent with Weber, the abolitionists clearly advocate for their moral principles and can do no less. They stress veganism as a moral imperative because they believe it is morally right. Yet, at odds with Weber, they also practice responsible activism. The abolitionists are clearly concerned about the consequences of their claims. They want the public to adopt veganism, and feel that they can achieve this by evoking common sense morality, specifically how animal use is wrong because it is unnecessary harm. While this approach might alienate the public, the abolitionists believe this outcome is not entirely unsatisfactory, as it will cause the public to wrestle with beliefs and behaviors. In short, the abolitionists are committed to the idea that they must be forthright with others if they expect them to change.

Is Weber’s distinction now meaningless? Of course not. His ideal type still has explanatory power. For example, while the welfarists and abolitionists complicate his dichotomy, the welfarists better represent responsibility and the abolitionists better represent conviction. Because each group practices responsibility and conviction does not mean that each group equally represents ethics as responsibility and ethics as ultimate ends. The welfarists, for

example, practice more of an ethic of responsibility. In many cases, that responsibility was seen as an unwavering commitment. Many of the welfarists, for example, claimed that activists should not tell the public what to do because it will perturb the public. In other words, they were committed to a particular strategy (e.g., individualism) and rejected the alternative (e.g., absolutism). However, a few welfarists believed that abolitionists' approaches could work with some people, but not the majority of people. As a result, they did not personally think they should present an abolitionist approach. These welfarists, then, were relatively negotiable about strategy. The same, however, cannot be said about the abolitionists, who believed the welfarist approaches were always ineffective and counterproductive. The welfarists and the abolitionists, then, specialized in Weber's different ethical approaches, but nevertheless they exhibited both in their activism to different degrees. Weber's distinction is useful here, but it is empirically more complicated than the ideal type would suggest.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Throughout the first four chapters of this dissertation, I have aimed to demonstrate how individuals make moral sense of (and with) animals, and the theoretical implications of such sensemaking. I have produced three main findings. In chapter two, I examined the animal selfhood literature in sociology. Using sociological evidence, I analyzed how animals may have selves by specifying five criteria of selfhood including self as attribution, self-awareness, intersubjectivity, self-concept, and narrative. I argued that animal sociologists fail to demonstrate how animals act toward themselves in a self-reflective manner. I therefore concluded that animal selfhood is empirically unverifiable. I also examined how animal sociologists have conceptualized animal selfhood in relation to animal rights. These sociologists argue that because animals have complex subjective states, animals' lives have value and that they have rights to moral consideration. However, because animal selfhood suffers from empirical and epistemological problems, it is problematic to assume animals have rights on the basis of unverifiable subjective characteristics. As an alternative, I contend that analyzing animals as symbolic resources is a fruitful sociological enterprise.

In chapter three, I examined how vegans think about and present their moral beliefs to nonvegans. I found that they use two types of individualism. Vegans who practice "strict individualism" do not believe that veganism is a matter of right and wrong nor it is a collective moral obligation. They do not impose their morals when interacting with nonvegans because they believe morals are individualistic decisions. In contrast, vegans who practice "strategic individualism" see veganism as a general moral imperative, but treat that imperative as a personal decision when they interact with nonvegans. That is, their private morals differ from

their public presentation of them. In particular, they strategically use liberal individualism to avoid conflict with nonvegans. Vegans individualize their moral claims to define the situation. Individualism, then, is not simply a cultural conviction, as sociologists so often conceptualize it, but a strategic resource that individuals use to achieve their goals.

Lastly, in chapter four, I interviewed and observed two animal rights groups—welfarists and abolitionists—to empirically analyze Weber’s ethic of responsibility and ethic of ultimate ends. Weber argues that those who practice an ethic of responsibility are concerned about the consequences of their ethical conduct and feel accountable for the results of their actions. Those who practice an ethic of ultimate ends, in contrast, do what they think is morally right independent of the consequences, motivated by the “flame of pure intentions” (1946: 121). However, I argued that there is not a sharp distinction between each ethic in practice, as each ethic involves some degree of both responsibility and conviction. For example, the welfarists are concerned about alienating the larger public through their activism, so they focus on tactics they think the public might endorse, like making small changes in their lives. Yet, the welfarists are not simply concerned about the consequences of their activism, but frequently felt an unwavering commitment to the means of their activism to achieve desirable results. The abolitionists, in contrast, advocate for the abolishment of animal use because they believe this is a morally right position. However, they are also motivated by consequences, since they are confident that their framing of animal rights will yield effective outcomes. They believe that they must be clear and direct with the public about veganism because this approach will effectively transform the public. They believe in doing what’s right *and* feel responsible for their activism. In general, the activists demonstrated both an unwavering commitment to responsible activism, but also thought

of conviction as a means to a desirable end. In other words, in practice, activists exhibit both a strategic deontology and a committed consequentialism.

One tension in this dissertation is the magnitude of the divide between human and animal. I have shown that prominent animal sociologists argue that the differences between humans and animals are a matter of degree more than kind. That is, animals are like humans. They have complex subjective states like thoughts, emotions, self-awareness, and even culture, though not to the same degree that humans express these traits. These subjective characteristics not only show that animals are similar to humans, but they also carry moral implications. As Leslie Irvine (2004) and the Algers (2003) have argued, if animals have selves and cultures, humans at the very least must think about their moral obligations to animals, ideally adopting an animal rights perspective. But thinking about such obligations is not enough. Irvine and the Algers advocate for humans to change how they treat animals. Thus, the argument that humans and animals differ quantitatively (rather than qualitatively) in social and cognitive characteristics means that humans have moral obligations to animals. Irvine and the Algers more or less argue that we must treat likes alike.

The perceived narrowing of the psychosocial human-animal boundary is also empirically associated with changing moral attitudes humans have of animals. For example, Irvine (2004) argues that by the end of the 17th century, cultural meanings of animals changed because of new scientific knowledge that demonstrated that animals were biologically and anatomically similar to humans in many ways. Charles Darwin argued that there was no fundamental difference between “man and higher animals in their mental faculties” (Irvine 2004: 50). In addition, during the 18th century, philosophers, such as Jeremy Bentham and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, argued that animals, like humans, were sentient beings. As the animal-human boundary became less

significant, compassionate pet keeping also became more common. These shifting views on the animal-human boundary were accompanied by changes in human behavior as animal protection associations, such as The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), and animal welfare laws were common during the mid to late 19th century (Irvine 2004).

However, there is also evidence that the social and cognitive similarities between humans and animals have, in practice, limited moral implications. For example, although scientific advances played a role in changing human representations of animals to a degree, this change has not had wide sweeping consequences. In contrast to Irvine (2004), Hobson-West (2007) has argued that advances in human understanding of genetic connections with animals have not mitigated “speciesism”, or discrimination directed toward animals. Humans have maintained their superiority over animals and will continue to defend it according to Hobson-West. For instance, animals are biologically sufficiently similar to humans to serve as good research subjects but different enough so that humans can morally defend their sacrifice. Even dogs, who are considered pets and companions by most Americans, are used in experiments although they are not common subjects (Groves 1997, Elder et al 1998). Also, in research on animal cloning and genetic modification, scholars focus on how these technologies benefit humans rather than the effects they have on animals (Hobson-West 2007). The animals’ own experiences are ignored in the biological sciences, perhaps indicating anthropocentric beliefs that the animals do not matter. If speciesism is still prevalent in science, it stands to reason to question how much of an impact science had on changing Westerners’ attitudes toward animals. It seems fair to argue that science had a positive effect on the changing views humans had of animals, especially pets, but scientific advances that challenged the human-animal boundary certainly remained limited in scope.

My research has similar implications. Western societies have changed how they have viewed animals over time, which has influenced how individuals think about animal welfare. However, the moral status of animals, especially farm animals, has arguably changed little. Pigs may be as smart as a three-year-old child, but humans still eat them. The argument, then, that perceived similarities between humans and animals has changed how humans morally think about and act toward animals is limited. Moreover, as I demonstrate in my research, the fact that many vegans and activists feel that they cannot talk freely about morality and animals perhaps demonstrates that humans still draw a sharp line between themselves and animals, that humans are thought of as subjects and animals are objects. Vegans and activists, in an effort not to perturb co-interactants, may affirm the view that animals are objects, especially by encouraging people to consume (fewer) animal products. While their end goal is to treat animals as moral beings, the means do not always match that end. This dissertation, then, shows that how humans think of animals is inconsistent. The human-animal divide is a moral enigma. On the one hand, animal sociologists argue that animals have selves and subsequent rights. Vegans and activists argue that animals deserve moral consideration. But on the other hand, vegan and activists' tactics acknowledge that the larger public views animals, especially farm animals, as instrumental objects. What is consistent in human-animal relations is paradox.

Theoretical Implications and Future Research

Conversion and Proselytizing

In the remainder of this conclusion, I go beyond my findings to speculate on their implications for broader sociological issues. This dissertation has implications for the sociology of conversion and what I call the sociology of proselytizing. The vegans and especially the animal activists I interviewed desired to change individuals in various ways, such as reducing

meat consumption, adopting vegetarianism or veganism, or avoiding events where animals are allegedly abused. The activists want to convert, or at the very least, alter the public to adopt an animal rights ideology and appropriate behavior. Their activism, both organized and interpersonal, is thus an act of proselytizing. Whether they participate in an organized public protest, such as protesting puppy stores or circuses on the streets, or in interpersonal activism, such as tabling or convincing someone to eat less meat or go vegan, the desired outcome is to transform individuals. While sociologists have researched conversion extensively, they have surprisingly paid little attention to the specific proselytizing strategies individuals employ in their attempts to convert or alter others to their ideology. After briefly reviewing the literature on conversion, I will demonstrate how my research relates to the sociology of proselytizing.

Much sociological research has focused on conversion—broadly defined as a radical change in one’s universe of discourse or worldview—within politics and especially religion. It is typically through joining activist or religious groups that individuals come to “see the light” about the errors of their ways, adopting a new self and new frameworks from which they interpret the events in their lives (Mead [1932] 2002). One central theme in the literature is conceptualizing conversion. Snow and Machalek (1983) in their classic review of the literature find that most conceptualizations of conversion emphasize radical personal change, a disruption of the self. However, as Snow and Machalek point out, sociologists do not know when radical change has occurred in an individual or how much self-transformation is necessary for conversion. Snow and Machalek (1983) argue that sociologists must attend to the converts’ “universe of discourse”—which are discursive frameworks individuals use to make sense of and convey their worldviews—to understand radical change in individuals. What radically changes, then, is the convert’s universe of discourse.

According to Snow and Machalek (1983), a convert's universe of discourse contains four rhetorical indicators, which differentiate converts from non-converts, the most important of which is biographical reconstruction. Converts use their new universe of discourse to construct a new biography, typically one that juxtaposes a misdirected and alien past with a corrected, promising present. Individuals use their new universe of discourse to redefine the past, and in doing so, create a new biography in light of recent experiences (Snow and Machalek 1984; DeGloma 2014). Non-converts, on the other hand, do not engage in biographical reconstruction because they do not experience self-transformations to the same degree. For example, in their study comparing Christian converts to non-converts, Staples and Mauss (1987) show that converts, especially born-again Christians, solely engaged in biographical reconstruction by rejecting a sinful and spurious past self, and embracing a current real self connected to Jesus. Staples and Mauss (1987) conceptualized conversion as a process of self-transformation in which converts create new visions of their "real selves". Conversion results in a change in the way individuals feel about themselves, which individuals express through language, typically resulting in biographical reconstruction. To best identify converts, then, Staples and Mauss argue that sociologists can simply ask individuals if they are converts. Since Staples and Mauss see conversion as a process of self-transformation, they argue that converts, not sociologists, are best suited to decide they are converts.

The second central theme in the literature focuses on recruitment, specifically how and why individuals join new religious or social movements. There are a variety of reasons individuals convert to a new ideology including both predispositional factors, such as personal openness to change, and situational factors, such as social networks (Stark and Lofland 1965). Social networks, especially preexisting affective bonds and intensive interaction with group

members, are particularly important for successful conversion (Snow and Phillips 1980, Stark and Bainbridge 1980, Klandermans and Oegema 1987, Snow et al 1980, McAdam and Paulsen 1993, Clark 2004). Individuals usually find out about religious or social movements through close contacts, such as relatives and friends, rather than strangers. Close contacts help provide information outside of group meetings, increase the credibility of the message and cause, and intensify the pressure to consider the message (Snow and Phillips 1980). By interacting and engaging in social acts with other members, individuals become members of the group. Indeed, in his study on the Nichiren Shoshu movement in America (NSA), Snow (1993) argues that social networks are the most important determinant in explaining conversion. For example, NSA members encourage prospects to attend four discussion meetings per week. Junior leaders also oversee recruits by maintaining constant contact with them, answering questions, introducing them to others in the group, and overall guiding the newcomer. It is through group meetings and the junior group leader that new members become socialized and converted to the group. According to Snow, the absence of such interaction makes conversion unlikely. When existing interpersonal bonds between members and recruits do not exist, recruits are unlikely to convert (Stark and Bainbridge 1980).

While intragroup social networks are important for conversion, they cannot explain all facets of conversion. For example, sometimes countervailing networks sanction individuals for converting to new groups, thereby making it unlikely potential converts have the time, energy, and freedom to convert (Snow et al 1980). There are also cases in which networks do not matter for recruitment. For example, some conversion is self-directed, lacking other's direct influences. Some individuals actively search for religious groups, or desire change in their lives. For example, Jindra (2014) argues that individuals who grow up in environments they experience as

restricting their freedom demonstrate more active searching for religious membership, typically groups that allow some self-expression and self-direction, like Unitarian Universalists. Such individuals actively look for groups to join, or seek out new ideas to live by, usually without network influence. Thus, while networks explain why some individuals convert to a group, networks do not explain why other individuals convert. Other factors, such as background experiences and educational levels, can have more causal significance than networks (Jindra 2014).

The focus on networks and recruitment also omits the role culture and ideas play in recruiting individuals. For example, Jasper and Poulsen (1995) find that animal rights activists rarely get involved in animal rights participation through family and friends, but through “moral shocks,” which are events or situations that induce such outrage in people that they feel compelled to political action. Recruits influenced by moral shocks are likely to join a group if there is congruence between their and the group’s cultural beliefs and images, and not on the basis of preexisting ties (Jasper and Poulsen 1995). In fact, moral shocks usually bring strangers together to form social networks. That is, the networks are not the causes of movement participation but the outcomes. However, Jasper and Poulsen do not dismiss the importance of networks. They argue that networks matter in some movements, such as the anti-nuclear movement. But other movements, like animal rights, are more likely to recruit strangers through moral shocks. More generally, networks are significant but largely because they are the confines in which meanings are conveyed between movement members and recruits. Thus, both networks and ideas are mechanisms for recruitment.

A Proposed Approach: The Sociology of Proselytizing

Most of the literature on conversion offers empirical support for the relationship between social ties and conversion. Recruits who have strong bonds with members of religious or social movements are more likely to convert to those movements than recruits who lack such ties. While networks help explain why individuals convert to a particular group, sociologists have glossed over the interactions embedded in the networks, specifically how proselytizers present their message to recruits. In other words, I am interested in the intervening process between the variables (Blumer 1956), specifically meanings and definitions conveyed during recruitment. Networks are sites of “meaning making” between co-interactants. As Jasper and Poulsen (1995) argued, networks and interactions are significant because of the meanings transferred between co-interactants. It is therefore important to illustrate how proselytizers persuade recruits to join their cause. In examining this process, I propose a “sociology of proselytizing,” which focuses on the proselytizers’ recruitment strategies rather than converts’ accounts of recruitment. The conversion literature has largely focused on converts, including why they convert, but very little on the meanings proselytizers convey in attempts to convert others. Because social connections matter for recruitment, especially as means of conveying reasons for joining a group, it is important to examine how proselytizers attempt to impart such meanings to recruits.

In my dissertation, vegans and especially animal activists act as proselytizers. Whether through group protest or individual conversions, the activists proselytize in an ultimate attempt to convert individuals to an animal welfare or rights ideology, or at the very least, alter individuals so they, for example, stop going to the circus, eat less meat, or are more open to animal rights ideologies. The animal rights movement is particularly suited for the sociology of proselytizing compared to other movements because the movement requests that the public engage in self-

alteration or transformation, whereas other movements, such as civil rights, tend to focus on the transformation of institutions and rules.

Based on my research on vegans and animal rights activists, I propose that proselytizing strategies center around interaction and ideas. The vegans and activists emphasize the importance of interactions as a means of connecting with others. For example, many activists believe that interactional styles are important recruitment methods. Activists think of interpersonal traits, such as friendliness and warmth, as means to allure others. They try to appear respectful and approachable to others. Certainly not all activists subscribe to this approach, but the activists I interviewed believed in “peaceful protests” in which activists do not affront the moral sensibilities of others. During peaceful protests, many activists self-consciously try to signal their moral virtue through civilized interpersonal traits. For example, many activists simply emphasized the importance of being “nice” and “friendly” as a way to capture the public’s attention and subsequently listen to their larger message. Many of the activists adopt this tactic because they want to combat the image of the preachy animal rights activist, yet they also want to appear as individuals others would want to emulate. Activists think of personality traits, then, as self-conscious activism tactics. Activists think it matters *how* ideas are imparted to others. For the peaceful protesters, this involves using personality traits that signal non-confrontation. Activists think that non-confrontation is important since their proselytizing is an attempt to transform the public into individuals like the activists; the activists, then, do not want to appear as individuals who possess interpersonal flaws, such as aggressiveness and disagreeability. As one of my interviewees, Carla, put it, “PETA is just so aggressive and so weird so that people don’t want to be them. You’re pretty much like an advertisement for vegans, like you want to be like oh I’m a vegan, I’m happy and I’m normal and I do normal things.”

For many of the vegans and animal activists I interviewed, activism involves the presentation of moral selves who mutually uphold a moral order centered around civility and non-confrontation. The activists value non-confrontation, and its interpersonal tactics such as friendliness and respectability, as an effective way to proselytize. They want to appear approachable and relatable so that others will listen to their message and perhaps wish to emulate them if persuaded. As Stephen Vaisey (2012: 451) puts in, “Morality is not just about what (not) to do; it is also about what kind of person it is good to become.” This proselytizing strategy also relates to Weber’s ethics of responsibility. Though Weber’s focus was on the content of ideas, responsible activism also involves how individuals try to define the situation. The vegans and activists I interviewed, both welfarist and abolitionists, practice an ethic of responsibility in this regard. They both wish to present themselves as individuals of responsibility and moral character, independent of their specific message, who use that self-image in their efforts to proselytize before others.

While activists believe that inviting interactions are important proselytizing techniques, they also believe that ideas matter. This is especially important for animal activists because the movement as a whole tends to recruit strangers rather than close contacts (Groves 1992, Jasper and Poulsen 1995). Activists thus have to rely on forging connections with others through the cultivation of ideas, rather than relying on interpersonal histories to convince recruits. My evidence shows that the ideas activists promote are embedded in American culture. In particular, animal activists usually tried to connect with others by emphasizing American values recruits may already desire. Many activists use conventional cultural resources—such as tolerance, pluralism, and especially individualism—to convince others to convert or alter their behavior. For example, vegans and welfarists often relied on making individualistic claims, such as

suggesting that veganism or consuming animal products is a personal choice rather than a larger moral obligation. In contrast, the abolitionists stress a different set of ideas, particularly that it is wrong to cause unnecessary harm to sentient beings. While the welfarists may find such proselytizing ineffective, the abolitionists think it is effective for the same reasons that welfarists think their approach is best: is it consistent with what the larger public already values. In this case, the abolitionists contend that the public believes that harm is morally impermissible if it is unnecessary. In general, the vegans and activists try to place the person within the larger culture to show them that what they value is consistent with animal welfare/rights. The activists' goal is to connect the ideology of animal rights to something the potential converts already value. As Jasper and Poulsen remarked (1995: 494) "Strangers can be recruited because of the beliefs and feelings they already have." In the eyes of activists, ideas are ways to connect with others, to recruit them to the movement.¹⁸

Putting everything together, the activists try to connect with the others using two methods. First, their proselytizing appeals to general ideas of human goodness embodied in the proselytizers themselves. Thus, the activists attempt to connect with the public by displaying positive personal traits, such as being inviting, warm, and respectful. Furthermore, the vegans and welfarists in particular wish to uphold the moral worth of others by respecting them, not judging them, and not telling them how they should live their lives. Second, activists attempt to connect to others through common values. The activists use conventional American values in an

¹⁸ This is the case whether the activists have strong or weak bonds with recruits. Indeed, activists note that family and friends are not always open to their beliefs about animal rights, sometimes to the point where conflict occurs. Thus, preexisting strong bonds are not always enough to facilitate recruitment to veganism or animal activism. The recruit has to be convinced to join the cause. Activists, then, usually present animal rights through the prism of American culture to connect with others.

effort to alter or convert others. In general, their proselytizing involves the use of conventional or orthodox cultural ideals to produce unconventional or unorthodox people.

More generally, the sociology of proselytizing could examine how proselytizers attempt to recruit converts through various discursive strategies, specifically how they impart meaning to potential converts. Sociologists could explore how movement members convey their beliefs to recruits, including their strategies for getting recruits to consider their message. Sociologists could also ask how proselytizing impacts recruitment. That is, they could study how proselytizing is related to the outcome of successful recruitment, manifested as relevant sociological factors or as informants' interpretations of relevant factors.

Distinctions and Boundaries

This dissertation also has implications for the broader study of symbolic boundaries, specifically moral boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions that social actors make to categorize objects such as people and practices (Lamont 1992). They frequently lead to in-group inclusion—characterized by feelings of similarity, belongingness, and group membership—and out-group exclusion—characterized by feelings of superiority and contempt. By distinguishing in-groups from out-groups through relational differences (vulgar/pure, clean/unclean, high/low), boundaries give members of in-groups a sense of shared meanings and collective identity that they utilize to reject members of out-groups. For example, Michele Lamont (1992; 2000), influenced by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), showed how American and French men, both professionals and workers, utilized distinctions or symbolic boundaries to place people in moral, cultural, and socioeconomic hierarchies.

Cultural sociologists (i.e. Lamont 1992, Edgell et al 2006) argue that in-group/out-group boundaries are not only essential to the construction of group identities but have a fundamentally

moral character as social actors draw boundaries to define worthy from less worthy persons. That is, moral claims are a key aspect of boundary work. Lamont (1992: 4) defines moral boundaries as drawn “on the basis of moral character; they are centered around such qualities as honesty, work ethic, personal integrity, and consideration for others.” Social actors use morality to describe who they are and who they are not. Morality helps individuals maintain a sense of worth, reaffirm their dignity independent of their class position, and locate themselves above others (Lamont 2000). At an interpersonal level, boundary work gives individuals a sense of worth, dignity, and honor (Lamont 2000), while at the macro social level, boundary work is central to the reproduction and legitimation of both symbolic and material inequality (Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1992; Tilly 2005).

In my dissertation, animal sociologists, vegans, and animal activists all drew moral boundaries, especially between practices and also among individuals. Each group drew moral boundaries against certain animal practices. For example, sociologist Leslie Irvine (2004) suggested that pet keeping is immoral because animals have the basic right not to be treated as things. Strategic individualistic vegans and activists argued that harming animals was wrong, though welfarists and abolitionists in particular disagree about how to correct this issue. The welfarists believe in making small incremental changes, like larger cages, to help animals while they work towards a world in which people do not use animal products. The abolitionists, in contrast, argue that these small changes do more harm than good, and therefore advocate for the abolition of animal use. Though they disagree on solutions, they often see the problem similarly: it is wrong to harm animals.

Each group also drew boundaries among individuals, though the strength of these boundaries is associated with the beliefs of the boundary drawers. For example, some vegans

who evoked strict individualism did not think of animal consumption as right or wrong. Because of their individualistic morals, they did not condemn nonvegans, arguing that nonvegans may not know any better. On the other hand, as beliefs become stronger, the likelihood of moral boundary drawing increases. For example, vegans who practice strategic individualism as well as most activists believed in veganism as a moral obligation rather than personal choice. With their stronger beliefs, they were more likely to be critical of nonvegans, believing that they were wrong for consuming animal products. They drew moral boundaries against them, seeing them not only as different but morally inadequate. Some vegans and activists would try to mitigate these boundaries, however, by arguing that nonvegans may not have been exposed to veganism as a moral outlook. In other words, they did not want to judge the moral character of nonvegans because of their presumed ignorance. While they thought that nonvegans were morally wrong to consume animal products, they did not disparage or reject nonvegans as evil or terrible people. They thus drew boundaries against individuals based on their practices without making harsh judgments of their character. This distinction serves strategic purposes as vegans and activists want to invite nonvegans to the cause rather than condemn them. This observation demonstrates that there is a gray area of boundary work, as people can draw boundaries based on practices but not necessarily insist on boundaries with those who enact the practices. Lamont (1992) argues that individuals defend boundaries through rejection, hostility, and even aggression to make sure that the “wrong types of people” are not entering *our* groups (Gans 1992). However, this is not always the case as individuals can tolerate or even feel indifferent about individuals who are the recipient of their judgements (Zerubavel 1991). However, a small number of interviewees also went further by evaluating the moral character of nonvegans. For example, in chapter three on

veganism, we saw Sherry compare nonvegans to slaveholders and say that eating animals is “sick.”

Increasingly, some sociologists (Sherman 2005, Brown 2009, Rivera 2010) have urged other sociologists to think about the properties of boundaries, including their durability. They claim that interviews, Lamont’s method, cannot fully tap the transposability of boundaries; boundaries drawn in interviews may not be very durable if individuals do not draw them across a wide variety of situations. Keith Brown (2009) argues that interviews de-contextualize distinctions because they cannot capture the situations in which social actors activate distinctions in everyday life. Individuals may feel comfortable making distinctions during interviews, especially against abstract people, but Brown argues that it is uncertain if they would make the same distinctions in other situations. Similarly, Rachel Sherman (2005) argues that symbolic boundaries made during interviews may not be very durable if sociologists cannot verify them in practice. In other words, absent observational data, there is reason to think that judgments are produced by an interview process rather than having a salient identity independent of the interview. And absent interactional data, it is impossible to know how much distinctions matter or for what purposes. The bottom line is that boundary work is contextual and conditional. For example, Brown (2009) argued in his research of fair-trade coffee promoters and consumers that an individual’s role (position in the market, such as a promoter or consumer), script (discourse one is expected to enact based on role), and audience (individuals with whom one is interacting) shape when agents activate their moral boundaries.

In this spirit, though I rely mostly on interview methods, I believe that my dissertation has implications for the properties of symbolic boundaries, including what I call “boundary salience” and “boundary negotiation.” Boundaries are salient when social actors are invested in

them. In such cases, boundaries are likely central to agents' sense of self. In my view, the vegans and activists in my dissertation were invested in their boundaries. They believe harming animals is wrong, so they have either made a change in their lifestyle (i.e., not eating animals) and/or have participated in activism. Yet, consistent with Brown and Sherman, vegans and welfarist activists do not draw consistent boundaries across a wide variety of situations. For example, each group draws strong moral boundaries in private, believing that it is wrong for humans to harm animals. However, they rarely present such strong views in public out of concern for alienating others. Does this make their moral boundaries weak, as Sherman might to argue? In other words, does inconsistent boundary drawing mean a boundary is weak? Furthermore, compared to the abolitionists, vegans and welfarists appear to draw weaker boundaries since the abolitionists are consistent in their beliefs and activist actions.

I agree with Sherman that inconsistent boundary drawing may signal a weakness of the boundary itself. For example, if Lamont's (1992) middle class workers criticize insincere phonies from their workplace yet hedge on their boundaries or fail to deploy them in practice, perhaps their moral distinctions are not very important to them after all. However, I believe that the durability or importance of boundaries is complicated in the context of activism, especially responsible activism. For example, those who practice an ethic of responsibility frequently tone down their message to effectively convey their beliefs to others. They may draw a strong boundary against a practice, but strategically reconstruct their beliefs to appease others who may disagree to reduce negative consequences. Their boundary drawing is inconsistent across situations. However, in this context, what sociologists may interpret as weak boundaries may really reflect differences in ethics and strategies. For example, the welfarists' strategy is to practice an ethic of responsibility as a way to limit conflict in their efforts to recruit others.

Though many believe harming animals is wrong, they did not frequently express this moral belief and often contradicted it by encouraging individuals to consume fewer animal products for strategic purposes. The abolitionist strategy, in contrast, is to upset the morals of others, to get them to wrestle with what is right. They believe that harming animals is wrong and express this message during their activism. The inconsistency or consistency in private morals and public activism may not reveal weak boundaries, then, but differences in strategies. In other words, I submit that the welfarists are not drawing weak boundaries simply because they are inconsistent across situations. Instead, using an ethics of responsibility, they have specific strategies of effective activism, and adjust their discourse appropriately. Thus, the welfarists' inconsistent boundaries are not simply a question of boundary salience but of strategic discourse. Future research could explore such issues, including the factors/contexts that facilitate boundary salience.

The literature on symbolic boundaries also pays little attention to what I call boundary negotiation. Boundary negotiation refers to how social actors negotiate the meaning of their boundaries with others, especially ignorant or unsympathetic co-interactants. While boundary drawing may not commonly occur during interaction since, as Goffman (1959) implied, interactions tend to promote solidarity over differentiation, there are times when individuals express their value judgments or are forced to account for these judgments. How do individuals utilize moral meanings during these interactions? Do the interactants negotiate the boundaries in moral or amoral ways? Using this dissertation, I submit that one central method of negotiating moral boundaries is by presenting them through the prism of common cultural resources. As I mentioned earlier, the vegans and welfarists tend to negotiate their boundaries by drawing on variants of American individualism. Such a tactic results in negotiating moral boundaries based

on eating animals with remarkably little moral rhetoric. By presenting morality as little more than a matter of individual choice, vegans and animal welfarists divorce animal consumption from morality as a collective obligation. The abolitionists take a different approach by claiming that ‘everyone already believes that harming animals unnecessarily is wrong’ and that we should extend this belief to animal use. In either case, both groups try to negotiate the meaning of their boundaries with common cultural meanings.

Of Morals and Manners

Throughout this dissertation, I have consciously eschewed making moral claims. In the last few pages, I will relax this impulse. I am an ethical vegan. My value orientation certainly influenced the research I pursued in my dissertation. I wanted to see how sociologists have studied animals. I also wanted to research issues in veganism and animal rights, mostly how vegans and activists engage with those who are unfamiliar with or even hostile toward animal welfare/rights. I certainly find it difficult to talk about veganism at times, even among open minded sociologists. However, while I am an ethical vegan, my goal was to describe and explain how animals have selves, and how vegans and activists engage in moral work. In other words, I do not see my research as a form of activism aimed to convince others, mostly sociologists, to become vegan. Unlike many animal sociologists, I have not written a conclusion criticizing how humans treat animals. Moreover, I have tried to avoid making value judgments from my evidence. I have not argued that humans should or should not be vegan. I have not argued that animals have or do not have rights. While I have moral convictions about animals, I have tried not to express them in this dissertation. I have, however, made moral claims about doing sociology. For example, I have argued that animal sociologists are not in the best position to verify animal selfhood, so they are better off (a nice way of saying “should”) to study animals as

symbolic resources. In what follows, I would like to conclude by examining the validity of sociological moral claimsmaking regarding intra and extra-sociological affairs.

In my view, sociologists have little justification to make moral claims, especially from their evidence. I take a Weberian position on ethics and sociology in the sense that I believe sociologists should practice value-free research. This simply means that sociologists should not make value judgments, meaning we should not make normative claims about what is desirable or undesirable, unless it is within the process of doing sociology. In other words, value judgements internal to sociology are necessary. For example, our values influence the topics, theories, methods, etc. that we use. It is impossible to avoid internal value judgments. For sociologists who study morality, what we think as moral issues involves a value judgment because our thinking is influenced by our moral views or standards.

However, sociologists have little justification to argue that extra-sociological phenomena are right or wrong because this is not where our expertise lies. We are trained in empiricism. We are trained to collect data to describe and explain aspects of society. We have authority, then, to account for what the world is like. For example, in the sociological study of morality, we should describe how groups think of right and wrong and explain their beliefs. Our training in empiricism, however, does not give us expertise on how to make value judgments. Such judgments do not come from our sociological expertise or through the sociological research process (Campbell 2014) but through our values. For example, my sociological toolkit does not give me any insight on whether the abolitionists or welfarists have the "correct" moral position. I certainly can describe and explain their moral positions, but my sociological perspective does not help me evaluate the morality of their positions and therefore advocate one over the other. Sociologists, then, have little authority to make moral statements, as such statements are not a

reflection of sociological authority but ideology. Sociologists who make such claims are not acting as sociologists, but public or moral philosophers (Abend 2008). In other words, sociologists should not make moral claims because they are not trained in moral philosophy and reasoning. When we make moral claims, they are often disconnected from moral reasoning, as if they speak for themselves. This is because we are not trained to make judgments about what is right or wrong. We are not experts in deontology. Roughly speaking, sociologists are better off treating morality as an empirical exploration, not a philosophical deliberation or moral intuitionally derived condemnation.

Sociologists sometimes confuse value neutrality with objectivity, but value-neutrality and objectivity are distinct (Campbell 2014). Value freedom does not mean that sociologists should be “objective” or free from bias. Objectivity is not attainable, as our subjectivity will affect how we do our research, including interpreting our evidence. Still, we should still try to prevent our subjectivity from influencing results as much as possible through reflexivity and peer review. We can, however, avoid making value judgements as this is a conscious action. For instance, we could avoid making a claim that something is wrong. Just because sociologists cannot be totally objective or unbiased does not mean sociologists should make value judgments. They are different issues.

I realize I am swimming upstream, especially with the popularity of public and critical sociology. Many sociologists feel compelled to make moral claims about inequality and forms of injustice. These issues are worth making moral claims about. Though, I do not think sociologists are in the best position to make them, not because they are not experts on the issues but because they are not experts on morality. Instead, knowing that sociologists are unlikely to shy away from moral claims, I believe sociologists should practice a minimalist morality. Here,

sociologists limit value judgments, and through their research demonstrate the consequences of problems, such as how social inequality affects outcomes in education or health or any other number of issues. The focus is how issues are related to outcomes rather than evaluating the outcomes. For example, the evidence that lower class individuals have less access to quality healthcare is not a moral claim, but it certainly has moral implications. Our evidence can help us inform the public and importantly politicians, who then can draw their own moral conclusions and perhaps mobilize to address the issue.

Though I contend that sociologists are ill-equipped to make moral claims, I still believe that sociology should have practical applications, but mostly independent of moral claimsmaking. In other words, sociology should inform public policy. Sociologists are well versed in social problems, like inequality, and could offer means to achieve goals of various forms of equality. However, this is not something to take lightly. We must offer the most effective means to achieving specific goals through empirical investigation. Sociology, then, can give us a sense of empirically effective ways of changing aspects of society. However, while sociology might inform us what is effective for achieving a goal, this does not mean that sociology can tell us what our means and goals should be (Black 2013). Still, such policy sociology is not without limitations. First, expertise on a social problem does not necessarily translate to expertise on how to fix or, more likely, mitigate the problem. Social problems are multifaceted, intricate processes so devising solutions is no easy task. Second, policy sociology could have negative consequences. Howard Becker (2003) argues that sociologists often want to make their research “relevant to society” by engaging in important issues and proposing policy recommendations. However, in doing so, they may make their research irrelevant because what is relevant is relative. For example, if we view a problem as someone else has defined it, others

who disagree with our position will disapprove of our construction of the problem and proposed solutions, making sociology irrelevant to them. Plus, sociological theories and methods do not help us decide who to help and what to fix. These again are driven by our values. Furthermore, the solutions we advocate may be impractical. They could be too expensive or result in unintended consequences, again making our solutions irrelevant to others. However, even with these problems, policy sociology is more desirable compared to overt moral claimsmaking in the sense that it is not simply making moral claims about problems but seeking and proposing solutions to problems.

In closing, sociologists are best to morally tread lightly because of our lack of expertise in morality and consequences for making moral claims. Sociology simply does not provide the tools to make convincing moral claims. In addition, the consequences of making moral claims may do more harm than good, especially by alienating the larger public who are a couple of standard deviations away from the political orthodoxy of sociologists. Still, it is difficult to divorce morality from sociology since much sociological data has moral implications, even if people interpret those implications differently. Yet, there is little justification for sociologists to argue that something is wrong and act as if that judgement is based on expertise.

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